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OUT WEST WITH WESTY MARTIN

FOUR COMPLETE ADVENTURE BOOKS
FOR BOYS IN ONE BIG VOLUME

By
Percy K. Fitzhugh

WESTY MARTIN
IN THE YELLOWSTONE
IN THE ROCKIES
ON THE SANTA FE TRAIL

Illustrated

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*
NEW YORK



"WELL, LUKE, AT IT AGAIN, HEY?" SAID THE GAME WARDEN.

Westy Martin.

WESTY MARTIN

BY
PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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WESTY MARTIN

CHAPTER I

A SHOT

A QUICK, sharp report rent the air. Followed several seconds of deathlike silence. Then the lesser sound of a twig falling in the still forest. Again silence. A silence, tense, portentous. Then the sound of foliage being disturbed and of some one running.

Westy Martin paused, every nerve on edge. It was odd that a boy who carried his own rifle slung over his shoulder should experience a kind of panic fear after the first shocking sound of a gunshot. He had many times heard the report of his own gun, but never where it could do harm. Never in the solemn depths of the forest. He did not reach for his gun now to be ready for danger; strangely enough he feared to touch it.

Instead, he stood stark still and looked about. Whatever had happened must have been very near to him. Without moving, for indeed he could not for the moment move a step, he saw a large leaf with a hole through the middle of it. And this hung not ten feet distant. He shuddered at the realization that the whizzing bullet which had made that little hole might as easily have blotted out his young life.

He paused, listening, his heart in his throat. Some one had run away. Had the fugitive seen him? And what had the fugitive done that he should flee at the sight or sound of a human presence?

Suddenly it occurred to Westy that a second shot might lay him low. What if the fugitive, a murderer, had sought concealment at a distance and should try to conceal the one murder with another?

Westy called and his voice sounded strange to him in the silent forest.

"Don't shoot!"

That would warn the unseen gunman unless, indeed, it was his purpose to shoot—to kill.

There was no sound, no answering voice, no pat-

ter of distant footfalls; nothing but the cheery song of a cricket near at hand.

Westy advanced a few steps in the dim, solemn woods, looking to right and left. . . .

CHAPTER II

A PROMISE

WESTY MARTIN was a scout of the first class. He was a member of the First Bridgeboro Troop of Bridgeboro, New Jersey. Notwithstanding that he was a serious boy, he belonged to the Silver Fox Patrol, presided over by Roy Blakeley.

According to Pee-wee Harris of the Raven Patrol, Westy was the only Silver Fox who was not crazy. Yet in one way he was crazy; he was crazy to go out west. He had even saved up a hundred dollars toward a projected trip to the Yellowstone National Park. He did not know exactly when or how he would be able to make this trip alone, but one "saves up" for all sorts of things unplanned. To date, Westy had only the one hundred dollars and the dream of going. When he had saved another hundred, he would begin to develop plans.

"I'll tell you what you do," Westy's father had said to him. "You go up to Uncle Dick's and spend

the summer and help around. You know what Uncle Dick told you; any summer he'd be glad to have you help around the farm and be glad to pay you so much a week. There's your chance, my boy. At Temple Camp you can't earn any money.

"My suggestion is that you pass up Temple Camp this summer and go up on the farm. By next summer maybe you'll have enough to go west, and I'll help you out," he added significantly. "I may even go with you myself and take a look at those geezers or geysers or whatever they call them. I'd kind of half like to get a squint at a grizzly myself."

"Oh, boy!" said Westy.

"I wish I were," said his father.

"Well, I guess I'll do that," said Westy hesitatingly. He liked Temple Camp and the troop, and the independent enterprise proposed by his father was not to be considered without certain lingering regrets.

"It will be sort of like camping—in a way," he said wistfully. "I can take my cooking set and my rifle——"

"I don't think I'd take the rifle if I were you," said Mr. Martin, in the chummy way he had when talking with Westy.

"Jiminies, I'd hate to leave it home," said Westy, a little surprised and disappointed.

"Well, you'll be working up there and won't have much time to use it," said Mr. Martin.

Westy sensed that this was not his father's true reason for objecting to the rifle. The son recalled that his father had been no more than lukewarm when the purchase of the rifle had first been proposed. Mr. Martin did not like rifles. He had observed, as several million other people had observed, that it is always the gun which is not loaded that kills people.

The purchase of the coveted rifle had not closed the matter. The rifle had done no harm, that was the trouble; it had not even killed Mr. Martin's haunting fears.

Westy was straightforward enough to take his father's true meaning and to ignore the one which had been given. It left his father a little chagrined but just the same he liked this straightforwardness in Westy.

"Oh, there'd be time enough to use it up there," Westy said. "And if there wasn't any time, why, then I couldn't use it, that's all. There wouldn't be any harm taking it. I promised you I'd never

shoot at anything but targets and I never have."

"I know you haven't, but up there, why, there are lots of——"

"There's just one thing up there that I'm thinking about," said Westy plainly, "and that's the side of the big barn where I can put a target. That's the only thing I want to shoot at, believe me. And I've got two eyes in my head to see if anybody is around who might get hit. That big, red barn is like—why, it's just like a building in the middle of the Sahara Desert. I don't see why you're still worrying."

"How do you know what's back of the target?" Mr. Martin asked. "How do you know who's inside the barn?"

"If I just tell you I'll be careful, I should think that would be enough," said Westy.

"Well, it is," said Mr. Martin heartily.

"And I'll promise you again so you can be sure."

"I don't want any more promises about your not shooting at anything but targets, my boy," said Mr. Martin. "You gave me your promise a month ago and that's enough. But I want you to promise me again that you'll be careful. Understand?"

"I tell you what I'll do, Dad," said he. "First

I'll see that there's nobody in the barn. Then I'll lock the barn doors. Then I'll get a big sheet of iron that I saw up there and I'll hang it on the side of the barn. Then I'll paste the target against that, see? No bullet could get through that iron and it's about, oh, five times larger than the target."

"Suppose your shot should go wild and hit those old punky boards beyond the edge of the iron sheet?" Mr. Martin asked.

"Good night, you're a scream!" laughed Westy.

Mr. Martin, as usual, was caught by his son's honest, wholesome good-humor.

"I suppose you think I might shoot in the wrong direction and hit one of those grizzlies out in Yellowstone Park," Westy laughed. "Safety first is your middle name all right."

"Well, you go up to Uncle Dick's and don't point your gun out west," said Mr. Martin, "and maybe we can talk your mother into letting us go to Yellowstone next year."

"And will you make *me* a promise?" asked Westy.

"Well, what is it?"

"That you won't worry?"

CHAPTER III

THE PARTING

THE farm on which Westy spent one of the pleasantest summers of his life was about seventy miles from his New Jersey home and the grizzlies in Yellowstone Park were safe. But he thought of that wonderland of the Rockies in his working hours, and especially when he roamed the woods following the trails of little animals or stalking and photographing birds. The only shooting he did on these trips was with his trusty camera.

Sometimes in the cool of the late afternoon, he would try his skill at hitting the bull's eye and after each of these murderous forays against the innocent pasteboard, he would wrap his precious rifle up in its oily cloth and stand it in the corner of his room. No drop of blood was shed by the sturdy scout who had given his promise to be careful and who knew how to be careful.

The only place where he ever went gunning was

in a huge book which reposed on the marble-topped center table in the sitting room of his uncle's farmhouse. This book, which abounded in stirring pictures, described the exploits of famous hunters in Africa. The book had been purchased from a loquacious agent and was intended to be ornamental as well as entertaining. It being one of the very few books available on the farm, Westy made it a sort of constant companion, sitting before it each night under the smelly hanging lamp and spending hours in the African jungle with man-eating lions and tigers.

We are not to take note of Westy's pleasant summer at this farm, for it is with the altogether extraordinary event which terminated his holiday that our story begins. His uncle had given him eight dollars a week, which with what he had brought from home made a total of something over a hundred dollars which he had when he was ready to start home. This he intended to add to his Yellowstone Park fund when he reached Bridgeboro.

He felt very rich and a little nervous with a hundred dollars or more in his possession. But it was not for that reason that he carried his rifle on the day he started for home. He carried it be-

cause it was his most treasured possession, excepting his hundred dollars. He told his aunt and uncle, and he told himself, that he carried it because it could not easily be put in his trunk except by jamming it in cornerwise. But the main reason he carried it was because he loved it and he just wanted to have it with him.

He might have caught a train on the branch line at Dawson's which was the nearest station to his uncle's farm. He would then have to change to the main line at Chandler. He decided to send his trunk from Dawson's and to hike through the woods to Chandler some three or four miles distant. His aunt and uncle and Ira, the farm hand, stood on the old-fashioned porch to bid him good-by.

And in that moment of parting, Aunt Mira was struck with a thought which may perhaps appeal to you who have read of Westy and have a certain slight acquaintance with him. It was the thought of how she had enjoyed his helpful visit and how she would miss him now that he was going. Pee-wee Harris, with all his startling originality, would have wearied her perhaps. Two weeks of Roy Blakeley's continuous nonsense would have been enough for this quiet old lady.

There was nothing in particular about Westy; he was just a wholesome, well-balanced boy. She had not wearied of him. The scouts of his troop never wearied of him—and never made a hero of him. He was just Westy. But there was a gaping void at Temple Camp that summer because he was not there. And there was going to be a gaping void in this quiet household on the farm after he had gone away. That was always the way it was with Westy, he never witnessed his own triumphs because his triumphs occurred in his absence. He was sadly missed, but how could he see this?

He looked natty enough in his negligee khaki attire with his rifle slung over his shoulder.

"We're jes going to miss you a right good lot," said his aunt with affectionate vehemence, "and don't forget you're going to come up and see us in the winter."

"I want to," said Westy.

Ira, the farm hand, was seated on the carriage step smoking an atrocious pipe which he removed from his mouth long enough to bid Westy good-by in his humorous drawling way. The two had been great friends.

"I reckon you'd like to get a bead on a nice, big,

hissin' wildcat with that gol blamed toy, wouldn' yer now, huh?"

"You go 'long with you," said Aunt Mira, "he wouldn' nothing of the kind."

Westy smiled good-naturedly.

"Wouldn' yer now, huh?" persisted Ira. "I seed 'im readin' 'baout them hunters in Africa drop-pin' lions an' tigers an' what all. I bet ye'd like to get *one—good—plunk* at a wildcat now, wouldn' yer? *Kerplunk*, jes like that, hey? Then ye'd feel like a reg'lar Teddy Roosevelt, huh?" Ira accompanied this intentionally tempting banter with a demonstration of aiming and firing.

Westy laughed. "I wouldn't mind being like Roosevelt," he said.

"Yer couldn' drop an elephant at six yards," laughed Ira.

"Well, I guess I won't meet any elephants in the woods between here and Chandler," Westy said.

"Don't you put no sech ideas in his head," said Aunt Mira, as she embraced her nephew affectionately.

Then he was gone.

"I don't see why you want ter be always pesterin' the poor boy," complained Aunt Mira, as Ira lowered

his lanky legs to the ground preparatory to standing on them. He *had* been a sort of evil genius all summer, beguiling Westy with enticing pictures of all sorts of perilous exploits out of his own abounding experiences on land and sea. "You'd like to've had him runnin' away to sea with your yarns of whalin' and shipwrecks," Aunt Mira continued. "And it's jes a parcel of lies, Ira Hasbrook, and you know it as well as I do. Like enough he'll shoot at a woodchuck or a skunk and kill one of Atwood's cows. They're always gettin' into the woods."

"No, he won't neither," said her husband.

"I say like enough he might," persisted Aunt Mira. "Weren't he crazy 'baout that book?"

"I didn' write the book," drawled Ira.

"No, but you told him how to skin a bear."

"That's better'n bein' a book agent and skinnin' a farmer," drawled Ira.

"It's 'baout the only thing you didn't tell him you was," Aunt Mira retorted.

Acknowledging which, Ira puffed at his pipe leisurely and contemplated Aunt Mira with a whimsical air.

"I meant jes what I said, Ira Hasbrook," said she.

"The kid's all right," said Ira. "He couldn' hit nuthin further'n ten feet. But he's all right jes the same. We're goin' ter miss him, huh, Auntie?"

But they did not miss him for long, for they were destined to see him again before the day was over.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUFFERER

IN truth, if this were a narrative of Ira Hasbrook's adventures, it might be thought lively reading of the dime novel variety. He had not, as he had confided to Westy, limited his killing exploits to swatting flies.

He was one of those universal characters who have a way of drifting finally to farms. And he had not abridged his tales of sprightly adventure in imparting them to Westy. He had been to sea on a New Bedford whaler. He had shot big game in the Rockies. He had lived on a ranch. His star performance had been a liberal participation in the kidnaping of a despotic king in a small South Sea island.

Naturally, so lively an adventurer had nothing but contempt for a pasteboard target. And though he did not wilfully undertake to alienate Westy from his code of conduct, he had so continually

represented to him the thrilling glories of the chase, that Aunt Mira had very naturally suffered some haunting apprehensions that her nephew might depart impulsively on some piratical cruise or Indian killing enterprise.

These vague fears had simmered down at the last to the ludicrous dread that her departing nephew (whom she had come to know and love) might, under the inspiration of the satanic Ira, celebrate his departure from the country by laying low some innocent cow in attempting to "drop" an undesirable woodchuck. She had come to have a very horror of the word *drop* which occurred so frequently in Ira's tales of adventure. . . .

But Aunt Mira's fears were needless. Westy had been Ira's companion without being his disciple. In his quiet way he had understood Ira thoroughly, the same as in his quiet way he understood Roy Blakeley and Pee-wee Harris thoroughly. The cows, even the woodchucks, were safe. The shot which turned the tide of Westy Martin's life was not out of his own precious rifle.

He had not taken many steps after hearing the shot when he came upon the effect of it. A small

deer lay a few feet off the trail. The beautiful creature was quite motionless and though it lay prone on its side with the head flat upon the ground, its gracefulness was apparent, even striking. It lay in a sort of bower of low hanging foliage and had a certain harmony with the forest which even its stricken state and somewhat unnatural attitude could not destroy.

As Westy first glimpsed this silent, uncomplaining victim, a feeling (which could hardly be called a thought) came to him. It was just this, that the cruelty which had wrought this piteous spectacle was doubly cruel for that the creature had been laid low in its own home. The friendly, enveloping foliage revealed this helpless denizen of the woods as a sorrowing mother might show her dead child to a sympathizing friend. Such thoughts did not take form in the mind of the tremulous boy but he had some such feeling. He was thoughtful enough, even at the moment, to wonder how he could have taken such delight in stories of wholesale killings. One sight of the actual thing aroused his anger and pity.

He approached a little nearer, this scout with a rifle over his shoulder, and beheld something which

startled, almost unnerved him. He could see only one of the eyes, for the deer lay on its side, but this eye was soft and seemed not unfriendly; it was not a startled eye. The beautiful animal was not dead. He did not know how much it might be suffering, but at all events its suffering was not over, and there was a kind of resignation in the soft look of that single eye; just a kind of silent acceptance of its plight which went to the boy's heart.

Who had done this thing, against the good law of the state, and in disregard of every humane obligation? Who had fled leaving this beautiful inhabitant of the quiet woods in agony? The leaves stirred gently above it in the soothing breeze. A gay little bird chirped a melody in the overhanging branches as if to beguile it in its suffering. And the soft, gentle eye seemed full of an infinite patience as it looked at Westy.

He was face to face with one of the sporting exploits of that horrible toy, the rifle. For just a moment it seemed as if the stricken deer were looking at his own rifle as if in quiet curiosity. Then he noticed a tiny wound and a little trickle of blood on the creature's side. It made a striking contrast, the crimson and the dull gray. . . .

CHAPTER V

A PLAIN DUTY

. . . And the great hunter crouching behind the rock brought his trusty rifle to bear upon the distant stag. The keen-eyed marksman looked like a statue as he knelt, waiting.

Westy recalled these words in the mammoth volume on the sitting room table at the farm. He had admired, even been thrilled at the heroic picture of the great hunter whose exploits in the Maine woods were so flatteringly recorded. It had not at the time occurred to him that the noble stag might have looked like a statue too. Well, here was the actual result of such flaunted heroism, and Westy did not like it. It was quite a different sort of picture.

Then, suddenly, it occurred to him that he was to blame for this pitiful spectacle. He who shoots does not always kill. But he who shoots intends to kill. If the fugitive had failed of his purpose it was because he had been frightened at the sound of

some one near at hand. The shooting season was not on, it had been a stolen, lawless shot.

A feeling of anger, even of hate, was aroused in Westy's mind, against the ruthless violator of the law who had been forced to save himself by flight before his lawless deed was completed. He had probably thought the footfalls those of a game warden. To shoot game out of season was bad enough as it seemed to the scout. To shoot living things seemed now bereft of all glory to the sensitive boy. But to shoot and not kill and then run away seemed horrible. This poor deer might suffer for hours.

Westy had seen a little demonstration of the kind of thing he had been reading and hearing about. Through the medium of the alluring printed page, he had been present at buffalo hunts, he had seen kindly, intelligent elephants laid low, and here he was seething with rage that the blood of this harmless, beauteous creature had been shed, and shed to no purpose.

But Westy was more than a sensitive boy, he was a scout. And a scout has ever a sense of responsibility. It was futile to consider what some stranger had done while this poor creature lay suffering.

All that he had read and heard about hunting big game and all such stuff was forgotten in the consciousness of a present duty. He, Westy Martin, must put this deer out of its suffering; he must kill it.

The owner of the precious rifle, all shiny and oily, shuddered. He, scout of the first class, must finish the work which some criminal wretch had begun.

He was too essentially honest to take refuge in his promise not to shoot at anything but a target. He had a momentary thought of that, and then was ashamed of it. Phrases familiar to him ran through his head. Serious boy that he was, he had always been a reader of the Handbook. *A scout is helpful. A scout is friendly to all. . . . A scout is kind. He is a friend to animals. He will not kill nor hurt. . . .*

Yet he was not friendly to all. He was enraged at the absent destroyer, who had made it necessary for him to do something he could not bear to do. He wished that Ira were there to do it instead. He who had admired the great hunter crouching behind a rock, wished now that the mighty hunter might be present to attend to this miserable business. He had never dreamed of such an emergency, of such

a duty. He wished that one or other of the sprightly youngsters in the advertisements, who were so ready with their firearms, might shoot for once in this humane cause.

Poor Westy, he was just a boy after all. . . .

CHAPTER VI

FIRST AID—LAST AID

HE never in all his life felt so nervous, and so much like a criminal, as when he reached with trembling hand for the innocent rifle with which he was to shed more crimson blood and destroy a life. He looked guiltily at the deer whose eye seemed to hold him in a kind of gentle stare. It seemed as if the creature trusted him, yet wondered what he was going to do.

There was a kind of pathos in the thought that came to him that the suffering deer did not recognize the rifle as the sort of thing which had laid him low. The creature's innocence, as one might say, went to the boy's heart.

He backed away from the stricken form, three yards—five yards. He felt brutal, abominable. The cautious little bird had withdrawn to a tree somewhat farther off where it still sang blithely. Westy paused, listening to the bird. Then he stole

toward the tree trying to deceive himself that he wanted to see what kind of a bird it was, when in plain fact all he was doing was killing time. The bird, disgusted with the whole affair as one might have fancied, made a great flutter and flew away to a more wholesome atmosphere. The bird was not a scout, it had no duties. . . .

Westy advanced a few paces, his rifle shaking in his hand. It was simple enough what he had to do, yet there he was absurdly calculating distances. Oh, if it had only been the white target there before him with its black circles one inside another, the only hunting ground or jungle Westy knew. Strange, how different he felt now.

He could not bear that soft eye contemplating him so he walked around to the other side of the deer where the eye could not see him. Then he felt sneaky, like one stealing up behind his victim. And through all his immature trepidation hate was in his heart; hate for the brutal wretch who had fled thinking only of his own safety, and leaving this ungrateful task for him to do.

Suddenly it occurred to Westy that he might run to Chandler and tell the authorities what he had found. That would be his good turn for the day.

Ira had always "guyed" him about good turns. That would seem like running away from an unpleasant duty. To whom did he owe the good turn? Was it not to this stricken, suffering creature?

So Westy Martin, scout of the first class, did his good turn to this dumb creature in its dim forest home. The dumb creature did not know that Westy Martin was doing it a good turn. It seemed a queer sort of good turn. He could never write it down in his neat little scout record as a good turn. He would never, *never* think of it in that way. If the deer could only understand. . . .

The way to do a thing is to do it. And it is not the part of a scout to dilly-dally. When a scout knows his duty he is not afraid. But if the deer could only know, could only understand. . . .

Westy approached the creature with bolstered resolution. He lifted his gun, his arms shaking. Where should it be? In the head? Of course. He held the muzzle within six inches of the head. A jerky little squirrel crept part way down a tree, turned suddenly and scurried up again. It was very quiet about. Only the sound of a busy woodpecker tapping away somewhere. Westy paused for a moment, counting the taps. . . .

Then there was another sound; quick, sharp, which did not belong in the woods. And the woodpecker stopped his tapping. Westy saw the deer's forefoot twitch spasmodically. And a little stream of blood was trailing down its forehead.

Westy Martin had done his daily good turn. . . .

CHAPTER VII

LITTLE DROPS OF WATER

THE feeling now uppermost in Westy's mind was that of anger at the unknown person who had made it necessary for him to do what he had done. He felt that he had been cheated out of keeping his promise about shooting. He knew perfectly well that what he had done was right and that only technically had he broken his promise to his father. But he had done something altogether repugnant to him and it turned him against guns not only, but particularly against the sneak whose lawless work he had had to complete.

It must be confessed that it was not mainly the fugitive's lawlessness or even his cruel heedlessness that aroused Westy. It was the feeling that somehow this work of murder (for so he thought it) had been wished on him. It had agitated him and gone against him, and he was enraged over it.

He had not been quite the ideal scout in the matter of readiness to kill the deer; he might have done that job more promptly and with less perturbation. But he was quite the scout in his towering resolve to track down the culprit and tell him what he thought of him and bring him to justice.

It was characteristic of Westy, who was a fiend at tracking and trailing, that this course of action appealed to him now, rather than the tamer course of going direct to the authorities. There was something very straightforward about Westy. And besides, he had the adventurous spirit which prefers to act without coöperation.

"By jumping jiminies. I'll find that fellow!" he said aloud. "I should worry about catching the train. I'll find him all right, and I'll tell him something he won't forget in a hurry—I will. I'll track him and find out who he is. Maybe after he's paid a hundred dollars fine, he won't be so free with his blamed rifle."

It was odd how he had balked at putting an end to the wounded deer, and then had not the slightest hesitancy to pursue, he knew not what sort of disreputable character, and denounce him to his face

and then report him. Westy would not show up with the authorities, not he; not till he had first called the marauder a few names which he was already deciding upon. They were not the sort of names that are used in the language of compliment. It is not to be supposed that Westy was perfect. . . .

He was all scout now. Yet he was puzzled as to which way to turn. It is sometimes easier to follow tracks than to find them. No doubt the fugitive had been some distance from the deer when he had shot it. Where had he been then? Near enough for Westy to hear the patter of his footfalls, that was certain. Also another thought occurred to him. The man's shot had not been a good one, at least it had not proved fatal. He was either a very poor marksman or else he had fired from a considerable distance.

Westy's mind worked quickly and logically now. He had easily the best mind of any scout in his troop. Not the most sprightly mind, but the best. He tried hurriedly to determine where the man had stood by considering the position of the wound on the deer's body. But he quickly saw the fallacy of any deduction drawn from this sign since the deer

might have turned before he dropped. Then another thought, a better one, occurred to him. The animal had been shot below its side, almost in its belly. Might not that argue that the huntsman had been somewhat below the level of the deer?

The conformation of the land thereabouts seemed to give color to this surmise. The ground sloped so that it might almost be said to be a hillside which descended to the verge of a gully. Westy went in that direction for a few yards and came to the gully. He scrambled down into it and found himself involved in a tangle of underbrush. But he saw that from this trenchlike concealment, the animal might easily have been struck in the spot where the wound was.

His deduction was somewhat confirmed by his recollection that it was from this direction he had heard the receding footfalls. A path led through this miniature jungle and up the other side where the pine needles made a smooth floor in the forest.

Presently all need of nice deducing was rendered superfluous by a sign likely to prove a jarring and discordant note in the woodland studies of any scout. This was a crumpled tinfoil package which on being

pulled to its original size revealed the romantic words so replete with the spirit of the silent woods:

MECHANIC'S DELIGHT
PLUG CUT TOBACCO

The tinfoil package was empty and destined to delight no more. But it was not even wet, and had not been wet, and had evidently been thrown away but lately.

It was immediately after throwing this away that Westy noticed something else which interested him. It was nothing much, but bred as he was to observe trifling things in the woods, it made him curious. The rank undergrowth near him was besprinkled with drops as if it had been rained on. This was noticeable on the large, low-spreading plantain leaves near by. Surely in the bright sunshine of the morning any recent drops of dew or rain must have dried up. Yet there were the big flat leaves besprinkled with drops of water.

Westy remembered something his scoutmaster had once said. *Everything that happens has a cause. Little things may mean big things.* Nine boys out of ten would not have noticed this trivial thing, or

having noticed it would not have thought twice about it. But Westy approached and felt of the leaves and as he did so, he felt his foot sinking into swampy water. He tried to lift it out but could not. Then, he felt the other foot sinking too. He hardly knew how it happened, but in ten seconds he was down to his knees in the swamp. Frantically he grasped the swampy weeds but they gave way. He could not lift either foot now. He felt himself going down, down. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

BARRETT'S

So this was to be the end; he would be swallowed up and no one would know what had become of him. The silent, treacherous marsh would consume him. He was in its jaws and it would devour him and the world would never know. Nature, the quiet woods that he had loved, would do this frightful thing.

Then he ceased to sink. He was in above his knees. One foot rested on something hard. But it was not that which supported him. The marshy growth below held him up. He was not in peril but he had suffered a shocking fright. He managed to get hold of a crooked branch of scrub oak which overhung the gully and drew himself up. It was hard to do this for the suction kept him down. It was evidently a little marshy pool concealed by undergrowth that he had stepped into.

For no particular reason, he purposely got one

foot under the submerged thing it had descended upon. He thought it was a stick. It came up slantingways till with one hand he was able to get hold of it. It was hard and cold. For this reason, he was curious about it and he kept hold of it with one hand while he scrambled clear of the tiny morass. It was dripping with mud and green slime. But he knew what he was holding long before it was clear of its slimy, green disguise. *It was a rifle.*

Then Westy knew the explanation of the wetness on the leaves. The rifle had not been there long. It had probably been thrown there in panic haste and the water had splashed up onto the low, dank growth which concealed the frightful hole. The gun would never have been found but for Westy's observant eye and consequent mishap.

He wiped the dripping slime from the rifle and examined his find. The gun was old and had evidently seen much service. On the smooth-worn butt of it was something which interested him greatly and seemed likely to prove more helpful than any footprints he might hope to find. This was the name *Luke Meadows*, evidently burnt in with a pointed tool, possibly a nail. Printed in another direction on the rifle butt, so that it might

or might not have borne relation to the name, were the letters very crudely inscribed *Cody Wg*.

Even in his surprise, Westy recognized a certain appropriateness in the word *Cody* burnt into a rifle butt; it seemed a fitting enough place on which to perpetuate the true name of Buffalo Bill. At the time he could not conjecture what the letters *Wg* stood for. But it seemed likely enough that Luke Meadows was the name of the owner of the rifle.

The gun had certainly not been in the swamp long for no rust was upon it. He believed that the owner of it, fearing to be overtaken with it in his possession, had flung it into the little swamp before fleeing.

He was not so intent now on finding footprints. Surely the person who had hidden the gun was the culprit, and it seemed a reasonable enough inference that he belonged in the neighborhood. The quest seemed greatly simplified; so simplified that Westy began formulating what he would say to the marauder. Of one thing he was resolved, and that was that the man should pay the penalty of his lawlessness.

Westy did not burden himself with two guns; he hid the one he had found in the bushes, then bent his

course eastward through the woods. If he had been going straight to Chandler to catch the train, he would have cut through the woods southeast, emerging at the edge of the town. But he changed his course now and went directly east because he wanted to reach the little settlement known as Barrett's. This was on the road which bordered the woods to the east and ran south into Chandler.

Westy would not exactly be going out of his way, he would simply be losing the advantage of a short cut. Barrett's was the nearest and seemed the likeliest place from which one given to illicit hunting would come. At Barrett's he would inquire for Luke Meadows.

The name on the rifle saved him the difficulties and delays of tracking. For with the culprit's name, Westy felt that he could easily be found.

In about fifteen minutes, he emerged from the woods at Barrett's. He had been there before, but one sight of the place now made him glad that he had not brought the telltale rifle with him. He felt that if he had, Meadows or Meadows' cronies might relieve him of it and put an end to its availability as evidence. It was safe where it was. . . .

Barrett's was one of those places that grow up

around a factory and subsist on the factory. Sometimes quite pretentious little villages grow up in this way and attain finally to the dignity of "GO SLOW" signs and traffic cops. But in this case the factory having put Barrett's on the county map closed up its door and left Barrett's sprawling. There was a settlement and no factory to support it.

When the Barrett Leather Goods Company stopped making leather goods, a couple of dozen men and as many more girls were thrown out of employment. With the leather goods factory closed there was nothing for the working people of Barrett's to do but move away or subsist as best they could by hook or crook. The better sort among the inhabitants moved away. Those that remained soon became a dubious set whose professional activities were, at the least, shady.

Barrett's was a sort of hobo among villages, an ill-kept, prideless, lawless place, having all the characteristics of a shiftless man who had gone to the bad. The countryside shunned it. And it was not considered a safe place for the youth of the surrounding villages, especially at night. Every now and then, some one from Barrett's was taken to Chandler and thence sent to jail. . . .

CHAPTER IX

ON THE TRAIL

BARRETT'S was not accustomed to visits from nattily attired boy scouts with rifles slung over their shoulders and the lolling youths of the settlement stared at him and commented audibly as he passed.

"Hey, what's that you got over your shoulder?" one of them called.

"That, oh, that's a soup spoon," said Westy, quite unperturbed. "Do you know where Luke Meadows lives?"

"What d'yer want 'im fer?" one of the natives asked.

"Oh, I just wanted to see him," said Westy.

"Whatcher want ter see 'im fer?"

"Oh, just for fun. Do you know where he lives?"

"He lives in that white house up the road," said a rather more accommodating boy. "Do you see the house with the winder broken? The one with

the chimney gone? He lives there, only he ain't home."

"He is too," contradicted another informer. "I seen him go in his back door half an hour ago; he come around through the fields from the woods."

"Thanks," said Westy.

If Luke Meadows lived in the house indicated and had indeed returned home through the fields, then he must have emerged from the woods at a considerable distance from his home, an unnecessary thing to do except upon the theory that he wished to throw some one off his track, or at least avoid being seen. Westy thought he could sense the position in which this man stood toward the game wardens of the county. He thought it likely that there had been previous encounters between them. Hunting game out of season is a pursuit which is pretty apt to be chronic.

Now that Westy was about to encounter this man, he felt just a little trepidation. Perhaps it would have been better to go to Chandler first. But then the matter would have been out of his hands. He wished first to tell this man a thing or two which scouts know. . . .

As he went along the narrow, dusty road, his

uneasiness increased. He was not exactly afraid but he was beginning to balk a little at the prospect of denouncing a person who was probably many years his senior.

The little houses along the road, which must have been hopelessly unsightly from the beginning, had fallen into a state of disrepair and squalor which seemed in striking discord with the surrounding countryside. A slum in the city is bad enough; in the fair country it is shockingly grotesque.

These little houses were double, each holding two families, and some of them were in blocks of three or four. They seemed to nestle under the shadow of the big wooden factory back in the field. Every window of the big factory was broken and a more forlorn picture of disuse and dilapidation could scarcely be imagined. From this factory a rusty railroad track disappeared into the woods; it had probably once joined the main line at Chandler.

Beyond these little rows of cheap frame houses was one which stood by itself. Its chimney was indeed gone and its window broken, but at least it stood by itself, was of a different color and architecture from the others, and had, in its shabby way, a character of its own. A little girl was swinging

on the fence gate, or would have been swinging if the hinges had not been broken. A dried and curling woodchuck skin was nailed to the clapboards beside the door, a dubious hint of the predilections of the householder.

CHAPTER X

LUKE MEADOWS

"Does Luke Meadows live here?" Westy asked.

"Yes, sirrrr," said the little girl with a strong roll of her r's.

"Could I see him?"

"I reckon you can," said the little girl, then without going to the trouble of entering the house, she called, "Dad, thar's a boy wants to see you."

These were the first samples Westy had of that characteristic way of saying *reckon* and *thar* which he had soon to associate with new friends in a free, vast, far-off region. It occurred to him that if Meadows wished to lie low, as the saying is, it might go hard with the little girl who was so ready to admit his presence to a stranger.

The appearance and reputation of Barrett's, as well as the unlawful shooting, had conjured up a picture in Westy's mind which had made him apprehensive about his reception. And now he felt that

the little girl might also feel something of the hunter's displeasure.

His kindly fear for her was quite superfluous, for presently there appeared from within the house a youngish man who absently, as it seemed, placed his arm around the child's shoulder and drew her toward him as he waited for Westy to make his business known.

The man was tall and raw-boned and wore nothing but queer-looking moccasins, corduroy trousers and a gray flannel shirt. His cheek-bones were high and he was as brown as a mulatto. What caught Westy and somewhat disconcerted him, was the stranger's eyes, which were gray and of a clearness and keenness which he had never seen in the eyes of any human being before. They were the eyes of the forest and the plains, the eyes that see and read and understand where others see not. The eyes that speak of silent and lonely places and bespeak a competence which only rugged nature can impart. Such eyes Daniel Boone may have had.

At all events, they disconcerted Westy and knocked the beginning of his fine speech clean out of his head. The man was calm and patient, the little girl wriggled playfully in his strong hold, and

Westy stood like a fool and said nothing. Then he found himself.

"Are you Lu—— Are you Mr. Luke Meadows?" he asked.

"Reckon I am," drawled the man.

"Well, then," said Westy, gathering courage, "I came to tell you that I know what you did in the woods because I—because I was the one that was there—I was the one that shouted."

"Yer seed me, youngster?" the man drawled, not angrily.

"No, I didn't see you," said Westy, "but gee, you don't have to see a person to find them out. You shot a deer and you know as well as I do it isn't the season. And then you hid your gun—I guess you thought I was a game warden or something. But I found it, I'll tell you that much and I saw your name on it.

"Do you know what you made me do?" he added, becoming vehement as his anger gave him courage. "You made me kill a deer, that's what you made me do! You made me kill a deer after I promised I'd never shoot at anything but a target—that's what you made me do," he shouted in boyish anger. "You didn't even kill it, you didn't!

Now you see what you did, sneaking and shooting game out of season! Now you see what you made me do!"

There was something so naïve and boyish in putting the injury on personal grounds that even Meadows could not repress a smile.

"I made a promise to my father, that's what I did," said Westy indignantly.

The man neither confessed nor denied his guilt. It seemed strange to Westy that he did not deny it since criminals always protest their innocence. At the moment the man's chief concern seemed to be a certain interest in Westy. He just stood listening, the while holding the little girl close to him and playfully ruffling her hair. Perhaps his dubious standing with the authorities made him lukewarm about protestations of innocence.

"Waal?" was all he said.

"And you're not going to get away with it either," said Westy.

Meadows drew a tinfoil package from his trousers pocket, took some tobacco from it and replaced the package in his pocket. Westy saw that the package was a new one and that it bore the MECHANIC'S DELIGHT label.

"You left the other package in the woods," Westy said triumphantly, "and that's how I happened to find your gun."

"Yer left the gun thar, youngster?"

"Yes, I did," said Westy angrily, "and I know where it is all right." Then the true Westy Martin got in a few words. "The only reason I came here first," he said, "was because I didn't want to seem sneaky. I didn't want you to think that I had to go and get the—the constables or sheriffs—I didn't want you to think I was afraid to face you alone. I didn't want to go and tell on you till I saw you first, that's all."

"Waal, naow yer see me," drawled Meadows.

"And I'm going to do what I ought to do, no matter what," Westy flared up.

"S'posin' yer run an' play," said Meadows to the little girl. Then, as she moved away. "An' what might yer ought ter do?" he asked quietly.

"You admit you shot that deer?" Westy asked. "Jiminies, you can't deny it," he added boyishly.

"Waal?" said Meadows.

"Do you see this badge?" said Westy, pulling the sleeve of his scout shirt around so as to display the several merit badges that were sewn there. "That

top one," he said in a boyish tone of mingled pride and anger, "is a conservation badge; it's a scout badge."

"Yer one of them scaouts, huh?"

"Yes, I am and I won that badge. It means if I know of anybody breaking the game laws, I've got to report it, that's what it means. I've got to do it even if it seems mean——"

"Seems mean, huh?"

"No, it doesn't," Westy forced himself to say. "Because what right did you have to do that? Gee, I don't say you wanted to leave the deer suffering, I don't say that." He had been fully prepared to charge the offender with that but now that he was face to face with him, he found it hard to do so. He put the whole responsibility for his purpose on his conservation badge, in which Meadows seemed rather interested.

"What's that thar next one?" he asked.

"That's the pathfinder's badge," said Westy.

"Yer a pathfinder, huh?"

"Yes, I am," said Westy, "but I guess maybe I'm not as good at it as you are. But anyway, if you know all about those things—shooting and the woods and all that—jiminies, you ought to know

enough not to shoot game out of season. Maybe that deer was a very young one, or maybe——”

“Haow ’baout my young un?” Meadows asked calmly. “How ’baout that li’l gal yer seed?”

“Well, what about her?” demanded Westy angrily.

CHAPTER XI

WESTY MARTIN, SCOUT

"WHAT makes yer say maybe I'm good at that sort of thing?" asked Luke Meadows.

"I don't know," said Westy; "just sort of you seem that way. But anyway, that hasn't got anything to do with what *I* have to do, has it? I got that merit badge by passing six tests, if anybody should ask you. And the last one of those tests is doing something that helps enforce the game laws, and you can bet I'm going to keep on doing that too. You'll have to pay a fine, that's what you'll have to do, and it serves you right."

"Yer goin' ter tell 'em in Chandler haow yer found my gun near the spot?"

"Yes, I am and it serves you right," said Westy. "You broke the law and you made me shoot—— Do you think it was fun for me to do that?" he flared up angrily.

"Waal, I reckon that'll be enough fer 'em," said

Meadows. "It'll cook my goose. They've got the knife in me, as you easterners say."

He sat down on the top step of his miserable home and seemed to meditate. "Mis Ellis over yonder, I reckon she'll look out fer the kid," he said. "'Tain't been nuthin but carnsarned trouble ever sence we come from Cody. If I could get one—*jes one*—good aim—*jes—one—good—shot*—at the man that told me ter come east and work in that thar busted up factory! The wife, she worked in it till she got the flu last winter and died. And here we are, me 'n' the kid—stranded like play-actin' folk. I can't shoot them factory people nor that thar loon I run into in Cody, so I get off in the woods 'n' shoot. Yer can get ten dollars fer a deer-skin if yer kin get through without them game sharks catchin' yer. Yer a pretty likely sort o' youngster, yer are. Never had that thar flu, did yer?"

He said no more, only sat with his hands on his knees, occasionally spitting. And for a few moments there was silence.

"Is Cody a town?" Westy asked.

"In Wyoming," Meadows answered.

And again there was silence.

"That's where Yellowstone Park is," said Westy.

"'Baout thirty or forty mile," said Meadows.

"That's where I'm going to go," said Westy.

Still again there was silence, and Westy felt uncomfortable. He felt that he would like to know a little more about this man. And that was strange seeing that he was going to Chandler to report him. It seemed odd that Meadows did not threaten or try to dissuade him.

Then, suddenly the whole matter was roughly taken out of Westy's hands. Two men, with a leashed dog, came diagonally across the road. They had evidently come out of the woods and their importance and purpose were manifested by the group representing Barrett's younger set which followed them in great excitement, running to keep up and be prompt upon the scene. There was no mistaking the air of vigorous assurance which the men bore. But if this were not enough the badge upon the shirt of one of them left no doubt of his official character. It was this one who held the dog and the tired beast was panting audibly.

"Well, Luke, at it again, hey?" said the game warden, in that counterfeit tone of sociability which police officials acquire.

"H'lo, Terry," drawled Luke, not angrily.

Surrounding the two men stood the gaping throng of curious boys. One or two slatternly women gave color to the scene. Somewhat apart from the group, a frightened, pitiful little figure, stood the child, Luke's daughter.

"You run over to Mis Ellis'," Luke said to her. But the little girl did not run over to Mrs. Ellis. She just stood apart, staring with a kind of instinctive apprehension.

"Well, Luke," said the game warden, "seems like you got some explainin' to do this time. What was you doin' in the woods? Killin' another deer, hey? When was you goin' back to get him, Luke? Better get your hat, Luke, and come along with us. Farmer Sands here seen you comin' out through the back fields——"

Then the little girl interrupted the game warden's talk by rushing pell-mell to her father. Luke put his big, brown hand about her and then Westy noticed that his forearm was tattooed with the figure of a buffalo.

"You run along over t' Missie Ellis," said Luke, "and she'll show yer them pictur' books; you run like——"

Here he arose, slowly, deliberately, as if with the

one action to dismiss her and place himself in the hands of the law. Then, suddenly, he lifted her up and kissed her. In all the long time that Westy was destined to know Luke Meadows, this was the only occasion on which he was ever to see him act on impulse.

But Westy Martin's impulse was still quicker. Before the little child was down upon the ground again he spoke, and his own voice sounded strange to him as he saw the gaping loiterers all about, and the astonished gaze of Terry, the game warden. In the boy's trousers pocket (which is the safe deposit vault pocket with boys) his sweaty palm clutched the hundred and three dollars which he was taking home to save for his trip to the Yellowstone. He had kept one hand about it almost ever since he left the farm, till his very hand smelled like the roll of bills. But he clutched it even more tightly now. His voice was not as sure as that unseen clutch.

"If you're hunting for the fellow who killed the deer over in the woods," he said, "then here I am. I'm the one that killed the deer and—and if—if you're going to take—arrest—anybody you'd better arrest me—because I'm the one that did it. I killed the deer—I admit it. So you better arrest me."

For a few seconds no one spoke. Then, and it seems odd when you come to think of it, the dog pulled the leash clean out of Terry the game warden's hand, and began climbing up on Westy and licking his hand. . . .

CHAPTER XII

GUILTY

HE took his stand upon the simple confession that it was he who had killed the deer. He knew that he could not say more without saying too much. And all the king's horses and all the king's men could not make him say more. Fortunately, he did not have to say more, or much more, because Farmer Sands availed himself of the occasion to preach a homily on the evil of boys carrying firearms.

"Who you be, anyways?" he demanded shrewdly.

Westy's one fear was that Luke would speak and spoil everything. For a moment, he seemed on the point of speaking. Probably it was only the sight of his little daughter that deterred him from doing so. It was a moment fraught with peril to Westy's act. Then, it was too late for Luke to speak and Westy was glad of that.

He was on his way to Chandler between the game warden and the farmer.

"Well, who you be, anyways?" Farmer Sands repeated.

It was Terry, the game warden, who answered him across Westy's shoulder.

"Why, Ezrie, he's jus' one of them wild west shootin', Indian huntin', dime novel readin' youngsters what oughter have some sense flogged inter him. I'd as soon give a boy of mine rat poison to play with as one of these here pesky rifles. It's a wonder he hit him, but that's the way fools allus do. What's your name, kid? You don't b'long round here?"

Westy, albeit somewhat frightened, was self-possessed and shrewd enough not to beguile his escort with an account of himself.

"I told you all I'm going to," he added. "I was going through the woods and I saw the deer and killed him. Then, I went through to Barrett's and I was going to come along this road to Chandler. If I have to be taken to a judge, I'll tell him more if he makes me. Please take your hand off my shoulder because I'm not going to try to run away."

"Yer been readin' Diamond Dick?" asked Farmer Sands, squinting at him with a look of diabolical sagacity.

"No, I haven't been reading Diamond Dick," said Westy.

"Wasn't yer stayin' up ter Nelson's place?" the game warden asked.

"Yes, he's my uncle," said Westy.

"He know yer got a gun?"

"Sure, he does."

"Well, you'd better 'phone him when you get to Chandler if you don't want ter spend the night in a cell."

Westy balked at the sound of this talk, but he only tightened his sweaty palm in his pocket and said, "He didn't kill the deer. Why should I 'phone to him?"

Farmer Sands poked his billy-goat visage around in front of Westy's face and stared but said nothing.

In Chandler, the trio aroused some curiosity as they went through the main street and Westy felt conscious and ashamed. He wished that Mr. Terry would conceal his flaunting badge. As they approached the rather pretentious County Court House, he began to feel nervous. The stone building had a kind of dignity about it and seemed to frown on him. Moreover in the brick wing he saw small, heavily barred windows, and these were not a cheerful sight.

What he feared most of all was that once in the jaws of that unknown monster, the law, he would spoil everything by saying more than he meant to say. He was probably saved from this by the dignitary before whom he was taken. The learned justice was so fond of talking himself that Westy had no opportunity of saying anything and was not invited to enlarge upon the simple fact that he had killed a deer. Probably if the local dignitary had known Westy better he would have expressed some surprise at the boy's act but since, to him, Westy was only a boy with a gun (always a dangerous combination) there was nothing so very extraordinary in the fact of his shooting a deer. Fortunately, he did not ask questions for Westy would not have gone to the extreme of actually lying.

He stood before the desk of the justice, one sweaty palm encircled about his precious fortune in his pocket, and felt frightened and ill at ease.

"Well, my young friend," said the justice, "those who disregard the game laws of this state must expect to pay the penalty."

"Y-yes, sir," said Westy nervously.

"It's an expensive pastime," said the justice, not unkindly.

"Yes, sir," said Westy.

"I can't understand why you did it, a straightforward, honest-looking boy like you."

Westy said nothing, only set his lips tightly as if to safeguard himself against saying too much or giving way to his feelings.

"A boy that is honest enough to speak up and confess—to do such a thing—I can't understand it," the justice mused aloud, observing Westy keenly.

"It's lettin' 'em hev guns that's to blame," observed the game warden.

"It's dressin' 'em all up like hunters an' callin' 'em scaouts as duz it," said Farmer Sands. "They was wantin' me ter contribute money fer them scaouts, but I sez—I sez *no*, 'tain't no good gon' ter come of it, dressin' youngsters up 'an givin' 'em firearms an' sendin' 'em out ter vialate the laws."

"They seem to know how to tell the truth," said the justice, apparently rather puzzled.

"He was gon' ter hide in Luke Meadows' place when we caught him red-handed an' he wuz sceered outer his seven senses an' that's why he confessed," said Farmer Sands vehemently.

"Nobody can scare me into doing anything," said Westy, defiantly. "I told because I wanted to tell

and the reason you didn't give money to the boy scouts was because you're too stingy."

This was the second time on that fateful day that Westy had shot and hit the mark. It seemed to amuse both the judge and the game warden.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PENALTY

"HAS your uncle a telephone?" the justice asked, not unkindly.

"No, sir," said Westy. "Anyway, I wouldn't want to telephone him."

"Could you get your father in Bridgeboro by 'phone?"

"He'd be in New York, and anyway, I don't want to 'phone him."

"Hum," mused the judge. "Well, I'm afraid I haven' much choice then, my boy. The fine for what you did is a hundred dollars. I'll have to turn you over to the sheriff, then perhaps I'll get in communication——"

Westy's sweaty, trembling hand came up out of his pocket bringing his treasure with it. Boyishly, he did not even think to remove the elastic band which was around the roll of bills, but laid the whole thing upon the justice's desk.

"Here—here it is," he said nervously, "—to—to pay for what I did. There's more than what you said—there's three dollars more."

There was a touch of pathos in the innocence which was ready to pay the fine with extra measure—and to throw in an elastic band as well. Farmer Sands looked shrewdly suspicious as the justice removed the elastic band and counted the money; he seemed on the point of hinting that Westy might have stolen it.

"Where did you get this?" the justice asked, visibly touched at the sight of the little roll that Westy had handed over.

"I had about twenty-five dollars when I came," said Westy, "and the rest my uncle paid me for working for him on his farm."

"There seems to be three dollars too much," the justice said, handing that amount back to Westy. The boy took it nervously and said, "Thank you."

The crumpled bills and the elastic band lay in a disorderly little heap on the justice's desk, and the local official, who seemed very human, contemplated them ruefully. Perhaps he felt a little twinge of meanness. Then he rubbed his chin ruminatively and studied Westy.

The culprit moved from one foot to the other and nervously replaced the trifling remainder of his fortune in his trousers pocket. He was afraid that now something was going to happen to spoil his good turn. He hoped that the justice would not ask him any more questions.

"Well, my young friend," said that dignitary finally, "you've had a lesson in what it means to defy the law. I blame it to that rifle you have there more than to you. Does your father know you have that rifle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Approves of it, eh?"

"N-no, sir; I promised him I wouldn't shoot at anything but a target."

"And you broke your promise?"

"Yes, sir."

Still the judge studied him. "Well," said he, after a pause, "I don't think you're a bad sort of a boy. I think you just saw that deer and couldn't refrain from shooting him. I think you felt like Buffalo Bill, now didn't you?"

"I—yes—I—I don't know how Buffalo Bill felt," said Westy.

"And if Mr. Sands hadn't got in touch with Mr.

Terry and found that deer, you would have gone back home thinking you'd done a fine, heroic thing, eh?"

Westy did think he had done a good thing but he didn't say so.

"But you had the honesty to confess when you saw that an innocent man was about to be arrested. And that's what makes me think that you're a not half-bad sort of a youngster."

Westy shifted from one foot to the other but said nothing.

"You just forgot your promise when you saw that deer."

"I didn't forget it, I just broke it," said Westy

"Well, now," said the judge, "you've had your little fling at wild west stuff, you've killed your deer and paid the penalty and you see it isn't so much fun after all. You see where it brings you. Now I want you to go home and tell your father that you shot a deer out of season and that it cost you a cold hundred dollars. See?"

"Yes, sir," said Westy.

"You ask him if he thinks that pays. And you tell him I said for him to take that infernal toy away from you before you shoot somebody or other's lit-

tle brother or sister—or your own mother, maybe.”

Westy winced.

“If I were your father instead of justice of the peace here, I’d take that gun away from you and give you a good trouncing and set you to reading the right kind of books—that’s what I’d do.”

“I wouldn’ leave no young un of mine carry no hundred dollars in his pockets, nuther,” volunteered Farmer Sands.

“Well, it’s good he had it,” said the justice, “or I’d have had to commit him.” Then turning to Westy, he said, “Maybe that hundred dollars is well spent if it taught you a lesson. You go along home now and tell your father what I said. And you tell him I said that a rifle is not only a dangerous thing but a pretty expensive thing to keep.”

“Yes, sir,” said Westy.

“Are you sorry for what you did?”

“As long as I paid the fine do I have to answer more questions?” asked Westy.

“Well, you remember what I’ve said.”

“Yes, sir,” said Westy.

“Did you ever hear of Lord Chesterfield’s letters to his son?”

“N-no—yes, sir, in school.”

"Well, you get that book and read it."

Westy said nothing. To lose his precious hundred dollars seemed bad enough. To be sentenced to read Lord Chesterfield's letters to his son was nothing less than inhuman.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR BETTER OR WORSE

It was now mid-afternoon. The boy who had gone to work on his uncle's farm so as to earn money to take him to Yellowstone Park, stood on the main street of the little town of Chandler with three dollars and some small change in his pocket. This was the final outcome of all his hoping and working through the long summer. He had just about enough money to get home to Bridgeboro.

And there only disgrace awaited him. For he would not tell the true circumstances of his killing the deer. He had assured Luke Meadows of his freedom; he would not imperil that freedom now by confiding in any one. His father might not see it as he did and might make the facts of the case known to these local authorities. Westy thought of the little, motherless girl clinging to her father, and this picture, which had aroused him to rash generosity, strengthened his resolution now. Westy was no

quitter; he had done this thing, and he would accept the consequences.

What he most feared was that at home they would question him and that he would be confronted with the alternative of telling all or of lying. He thought only of Luke Meadows and of the little girl. And being in it now, for better or worse, he was resolved that he would stand firm upon the one simple, truthful admission that he had killed a deer.

Yet he was so essentially honest that he could not think of returning to Bridgeboro without first going back to the farm to tell them what he had done. He knew that this would mean questioning and might possibly, through some inadvertence of his own, be the cause of the whole story coming to light. But he could not think of going to Bridgeboro, leaving these people who had been so kind to him to hear of his disgrace from others. He would go back himself and tell his aunt; he would be in a great hurry to catch the later train and that would save him from being questioned. Yet it seemed a funny thing to do to go back and hurriedly announce that he had killed a deer and as hurriedly depart. Poor Westy, he was beginning to see the difficulties involved in his spectacular good turn.

He wandered over to the railroad, worried and perplexed. Wherever he might go there would be trouble. He would have to face his aunt and uncle, then his father and mother. And he could not explain. How could he hope to run the gauntlet of all these people with just the one little technical truth that he had killed a deer?

It was just beginning to dawn on him that truth is not a technical thing at all, that to stick to a technical truth may be very dishonest. Yet, he had (so he told himself) killed the deer. And that one technical little truth he had invoked to save Luke Meadows.

He would not, he *could* not turn back now.

CHAPTER XV

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

HE could catch a train to Bridgeboro in half an hour and leave the thunderbolt to break at the farm after he was safely away. Or he could return to the farm and still catch a train from Chandler at eight-twenty. He decided to do this.

He lingered weakly in the station for a few minutes, killing time and trying to make up his mind just what he would say when he reached the farm. The station was dim and musty and full of dust and aged posters. One of these latter was a glaring advertisement of an excursion to Yellowstone Park. It included a picture of Old Faithful Geyser, that watery model of constancy which is to be seen on every folder and booklet describing the Yellowstone. Westy looked at it wistfully. "See the glories of your native land," the poster proclaimed. He read it all, then turned away.

The ticket office was closed, and in his troubled

and disconsolate mood it seemed to him as if even the railroad shut him out. Not a living soul was there in the station except a queer-looking woman with spectacles and a sunbonnet and an outlandish bag at her feet. Westy wondered whether she were going to New York.

Then he wondered whether, when he reached Bridgeboro, he might not properly say that he was very sleepy and let his confession go over till morning. Then it occurred to him that he was just dilly-dallying, and he strode out of the station and through the little main street where farming implements were conspicuous among the displays. He paused to glance at these and other things in which he had never before had an interest. Never before had he found so many excuses for pausing along a business thoroughfare.

He intended to return through the woods but a man in a buckboard with a load of clanking milk cans gave him a lift and set him down at the cross-roads near the farm. He cut up through the orchard because he had a queer feeling that he did not want any one to see him coming. It seemed very quiet about the farm; he had an odd feeling that he was seeing it during his own absence. It looked strange

to see his aunt stringing beans on the little porch outside the kitchen and Ira sitting with his legs stretched along the lowest step. His back was against the house and he was smoking his pipe. The homely, familiar scene made Westy homesick for the farm.

"Mercy on us, what you doin' here?" Aunt Mira gasped. "Westy! You near skeered the life out of me!"

Ira removed his atrocious pipe from his mouth long enough to inquire without the least sign of shock. "What's the matter, kid? Get lost in the woods and missed your train?"

"No, I didn't get lost in the woods," said Westy, with a touch of testiness.

"Land's sake, Iry, why can't you never stop plaguin' the boy," said Aunt Mira.

"I came back," said Westy rather clumsily. "I came back to tell you something. I've got something I want to tell you because I—because I want to be the one to tell you——"

"You lost your money," interrupted Aunt Mira. "I told your uncle he should have made you a check."

"Scouts and them kind don't carry no checks," said Ira.

"I came back," said Westy, "because I want to tell you that I shot a deer in the woods and killed him. It's true so you needn't ask me any questions about it because—because I shot him because I had good reasons—anyway, because I wanted to, so there's no good talking about it."

Aunt Mira laid down her work and stared at Westy. Ira removed his pipe and looked at him keenly yet somewhat amusedly. Aunt Mira's look was one of blank incredulity. Ira could not be so easily jarred out of his accustomed calm.

"Where'd yer shoot 'im?" he asked.

"In the woods," said Westy; "in—in—do you mean where—what part of him? In his head."

"Plunked 'im good, huh? Ye'll have Terry after you, then you'll have ter give 'im ten bucks to hush the matter up. Just couldn't resist, huh?"

"Ira, you keep still," commanded Aunt Mira, concentrating her attention on Westy. "What do you mean tellin' such nonsense?" she questioned.

"I mean just that," said Westy; "that I killed a deer and I did it because I wanted to. Then I went through the woods to Barrett's because I decided to go to Chandler that way, and while I was talking to a man there the game warden and another man

came along because they must have been—they must have known about it or something.

"Anyway, I told them I did it—killed the deer. So then I got arrested and they took me to Chandler and the judge or justice of the peace or whatever they call him, he said I had to pay a hundred dollars, so I did. I've got enough left to get home with, all right. But anyway, I didn't want you to hear about it because I wanted to tell you myself. I've got to stand the blame because I killed him and so that's all there is to it."

It was fortunate for Westy that Aunt Mira was too dumfounded for words. As for Ira, his face was a study during the boy's recital. He watched Westy shrewdly, now and then with a little glint of amusement in his eye as the young sportsman stumbled along with his boyish confession. Only once did he speak and that was when the boy had finished.

"Who was the man you was talkin' with in Barrett's, kid?"

"His name is Meadows," Westy answered.

"Hmph," was Ira's only comment.

Indeed he had no opportunity for comment for Aunt Mira was presently upon him and her incisive commentary on Ira's qualities probably saved Westy

the discomfort of further questioning. He was such a thoroughly good boy that now when he confessed to doing wrong, Aunt Mira felt impelled to lay the blame to some one else. And Ira was the victim. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

AUNT MIRA AND IRA

"Now you see, Iry Hasbrook, where your boastin' and braggin' and lyin' yarns has led to," said Aunt Mira, after Westy had gone. It had proved impossible to detain him, and he had marched off after his sensational disclosure with a feeling of infinite relief that no complications had occurred. But he might have seen danger of complications in Ira's shrewd, amused look if he had only taken the trouble to notice it.

"He's a great kid," said Ira.

"A pretty mess you've got him in," said Aunt Mira, "with your *droppin'* this and *droppin'* that. Now he's *dropped* his deer and I hope you're satisfied. 'Twouldn't be no wonder if he ran away to sea and you to blame, Ira Hasbrook. It's because he's so good and trustin' and makes heroes out of every one, even fools like you with your kidnappin' kings and rum smugglin' and what all."

"How 'bout the book in the settin' room?" Ira asked.

Aunt Mira made no answer to this but she at least paid Ira the compliment of rising from her chair with such vigor of determination that the dishpan full of beans which had been reposing in her lap was precipitated upon the floor. She strode into the sitting-room where the "sumptuous, gorgeously illustrated volume" lay upon the innocent worsted tidy which decorously covered the marble of the center table.

Laying hands upon it with such heroic determination as never one of its flaunted hunters showed, she conveyed it to the kitchen and forthwith cremated it in the huge cooking stove. Then she returned to the back porch with an air that suggested that what she had just done to the book was intended as an illustration of what she would like to do to Ira himself. But Ira was not sufficiently sensitive to take note of this ghastly implication.

"Yer recipe for makin' currant wine was in that book," was all he said.

For a moment, Aunt Mira paused aghast. It seemed as if, in spite of her spectacular display, Ira had the better of her. He sat calmly smoking his pipe.

"Why didn't you call to me that it was there?" she demanded sharply.

"You wouldn't of believed me, I'm such a liar," said Ira quietly.

"I don't want to hear no more of your talk, Iry," said the distressed and rather baffled lady. "I don't know as I mind losin' the recipe. What I'm thinkin' about is the hundred dollars that poor boy worked to get—and you went and lost for him."

She had subsided to the weeping stage now and she sat down in the old wooden armchair and lifted her gingham apron to her eyes and all Ira could see was her gray head shaking. Her anger and decisive action had used up all her strength and she was a touching enough spectacle now, as she sat there weeping silently, the string beans and the empty dishpan scattered on the porch floor at her feet.

"He's all right, aunty," was all that Ira said.

"I thank heavens he told the truth 'bout it least-ways," Aunt Mira sobbed, pathetically groping for the dishpan. "I thank heavens he come back here like a little man and told the truth. I couldn't of beared it if he'd just sneaked away and lied. He won't lie to Henry—if he wouldn't lie to me he won't lie to Henry. I do hope Henry won't be hard with

him—I know he won't lie to his father, 'tain't him to do that. He was just tempted, he saw the deer and his head was full of all what you told him and that pesky book I hope the Lord will forgive me for ever buyin'. I'm goin' to write to Henry this very night and tell him I burned up the book and prayed for forgiveness for you, Iry Hasbrook—I am."

Ira puffed his horrible pipe in silence for a few moments, and in that restful interval could be heard the sound of the bars being let down so that the cows might return to their pasture. The bell on one wayward cow sounded farther and farther off as Uncle Dick, all innocent of the little tragedy, drove the patient beasts into the upper meadow.

The clanking bell reminded poor Aunt Mira to say, "You told him he couldn't even shoot a cow, you did, Iry."

"He's just about the best kid that ever was," was all that Ira answered.

"I'm goin' to write to Henry to-night and I'm goin' to tell him, Iry, just what you been doin', I am. I'm goin' to tell him that poor boy isn't to blame. I know Henry won't be hard on him. I'm

goin' to tell him about that book and ask him to forgive me my part in it," the poor lady wept.

"Ask him if he's got a good recipe for currant wine," drawled Ira.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HOMECOMING

AUNT MIRA'S tearful prayers were not fully answered, not immediately at all events. Westy's father *was* "hard on him." His well advertised prejudice against rifles as "toys" seemed justified in the light of his son's fall from grace. Westy did not have to incur the perils of a detailed narrative.

Mr. Martin, notwithstanding his faith in his son, had always been rather fanatical about this matter of "murderous weapons" even where Westy was concerned. He was very pig-headed, as Westy's mother often felt constrained to declare, and the mere fact of the killing of the deer was quite enough for a gentleman in his state of mind. Fortunately, he did not prefer a kindly demand for particulars.

"I just did it and I'm not going to make any excuses," said Westy simply. "I told you I did it because I wouldn't do a thing like that and not tell you.

You can't say I didn't come home and tell you the truth."

The memorable scene occurred in the library of the Martin home, Westy standing near the door ready to make his exit obediently each time his father thundered, "That's all I've got to say." First and last Mr. Martin said this as many as twenty times. But there seemed always more to say and poor Westy lingered, fending the storm as best he could.

It was the night of his arrival home, his little trunk had been delivered earlier in the day, and on the library table were several rustic mementos of the country which the boy had thought to purchase for his parents and his sister Doris. A plenitude of rosy apples (never forgotten by the homecoming vacationist) were scattered on the sofa where Doris sat sampling one of them. Mrs. Martin sat at the table, a book inverted in her lap. Mr. Martin strode about the room while he talked.

They had all been away and the furniture was still covered with ghostly sheeting. About the only ornaments at large were the little birch bark gewgaws and the imitation bronze ash receptacle which Westy had brought with him. This latter, which seemed to

mock the poor boy's welcome home had GREETINGS FROM CHANDLER printed on it and was for his father.

"And that's all I've got to say," said Mr. Martin.

"Anyway, I didn't lie," said Westy, his eyes brimming.

"I never accused you of lying and I'm not laying all the blame to you either," thundered his father.

"Three and three and three make nine. A boy, a gun, and a wild animal make a killing and that's all there is to it."

"Well, then let's talk of something else," said Mrs. Martin gently. "Don't you think this ash tray is very pretty? Westy brought it to you, dear."

"For goodness' sake, don't use the word *dear* again, mother," said Doris, munching her apple. "I've heard so much about deers——"

"And the boy's lost a hundred dollars!" thundered Mr. Martin, ignoring his daughter. "When I was his age——"

"Well, he's had his lesson," said Doris sweetly. "A hundred dollars isn't so much for a good lesson."

"No?" said her father. "It's enough for you to make a big fuss about when you want it. I said from the beginning that I was opposed to firearms.

I don't want them around the house—look at Doctor Warren's boy."

At this Doris sank into a limp attitude of utter despair, for the accidental killing of the Warren boy had occurred before Westy was born and it had been cited on an average of twice a day ever since Westy's rifle had been brought into the house under the frowning protest of his father.

"Well, now, let's settle this matter once and for all," said Mr. Martin. "And I don't want to be interrupted either," he added. "You've bought a gun against my wishes," he said, turning on Westy. "You had to have a gun—nothing would do but a gun. Your mother saw no harm. Your sister said there was—what did you say?—something heroic, was it, about a gun? All right, you got the gun—repeater or whatever it is. I asked you not to take it away with you but you must take it to shoot at targets. You went up there to earn some money to go out to the Yellowstone. Now here you are back again with hardly a cent in your pockets and you've broken the law and the one thing I'm thankful for is that you haven't shed the blood of some other boy. Now this is the last word I'm going to say about it——"

Doris groaned, Mrs. Martin looked sadly at her son who was listening respectfully, shifting from one foot to the other, his straightforward eyes brimming over.

"This is the last I'm going to say about it," repeated Mr. Martin in a way which did actually at last suggest something in the way of a decisive end of the whole business. "Now, Westy," he continued with a note of feeling in his voice, "you've put an end to all my thoughts about going to the Yellowstone with you." Westy gulped, listening. "You've paid the money you earned and saved to keep yourself out of jail. Three and three and three make nine——"

"Just the same as they did before," said Doris sweetly.

"—a boy, a gun, and a wild animal, those three things spell danger. Now, my boy, I'm not going to go on blaming you and I'm not going to ask you any questions because those three things answer the question good enough for me. Boy—gun—— And you've lost a hundred dollars and had a good scare. I don't blame you that you don't want to talk about it. The gun spoke for itself; am I right?"

"Y-yes, sir," Westy gulped.

"All right then, as they say, return the goods and no questions asked. They say every dog is entitled to one bite and I suppose every boy that has a gun gets one shot. Now you've had yours and paid a good price for it. Now, Westy, you bring me that gun, here and now." He clapped his hands with an air of finality and there followed a tense silence.

"If—if I don't—if I promise not to use—even take it outdoors——"

"No, sir, you bring me that gun here and now."

Mr. Martin was grimly mandatory and neither his wife nor daughter ventured a word, though Mrs. Martin looked the picture of misery. Westy brought his precious rifle from his room and handed it to his father. Mr. Martin held it as if it were a poisonous snake. The mirthful Doris placed the apple she was eating upon her head as if to invite the modern William Tell to shoot it off. But Mr. Martin was not tuned to this sort of banter.

Unlocking the closet beside the fireplace he gingerly lay the rifle inside it and locked the closet again, joggling the door to give himself double assurance that it was securely locked. In his over-sensitive

state, Westy construed this last act as an implication by his father that his son might later try to get the door open.

"You don't have to lock it," said Westy proudly.

"It isn't you he's thinking about, dearie," said Mrs. Martin. "He's afraid about the gun."

Very likely that was true. Mr. Martin had indeed lost some faith in Westy's ability to keep his promise where a gun was concerned, but his confidence in his son had not diminished to a point where he believed Westy would invade that forbidden closet. Probably Doris expressed her father's mental state accurately enough when she said later to her mother,

"He isn't afraid that Westy will break in, he's afraid that the gun will break out. The rifle has got father's goat as well as somebody or other's deer."

"You shouldn't use such slang, dear," said Mrs. Martin gently.

The dungeon to which the rifle had been consigned was one of those holy of holies to be found in every household. Mr. Martin had always been the exclusive warden of this mysterious retreat.

As a little boy, Westy had supposed it contained a skeleton (he never knew why he thought so) and that all his father's worldly wealth was there secreted

in an iron chest of the kind which has always been in vogue with pirates. Later, when he had learned of the existence of banks he had abandoned this belief and had come to know (he knew not how) that the closet contained books which had undergone parental censorship and been banned from the library shelves. Doris had never regarded this closet with the same reverential awe that Westy had shown for it; she said it was full of moths and that its forbidden literature was easily procurable through other sources.

But ever since Westy and Roy Blakeley had tried to peek in through the keyhole of this closet to discover the skeleton there, the son of the house had looked upon it as a place of mystery. And though it had lost some of the glamor of romance as he had grown older, he knew that whatever was in it never came out. It was a tomb.

CHAPTER XVIII

A RAY OF SUNSHINE

MRS. MARTIN gave Westy about ten minutes to regain his poise and then followed him to his room where his open trunk stood in the middle of the floor. Westy was sitting on the bed and the oil-cloth cover of his departed rifle lay like a snake upon the pretty bedspread. It was evident that when he had gone to his room to get the gun in obedience to his father's demand, he had removed the cover to gaze at his treasure before handing it over. Mrs. Martin lifted the limp thing and hung it over the foot-board.

"I'm going to ask him to put the gun in it," Westy said wistfully.

"I don't think I would, dearie," said his mother, sitting down on the bed beside him. "I think I just wouldn't say any more about it; let the matter drop. If you speak to him again he will only flare up.

Doris says she thinks some ancestor of his may have been killed by a rifle back in the dark ages; some cave man, that's what she says. And she thinks the fear of guns is in your father's blood. He's very nervous about such things, dearie."

"They didn't have rifles in the dark ages," said Westy.

"I know, but it's just the way Doris talks; she's very modern and independent. She shouldn't say that a hundred dollars isn't a great deal of money, for it is. Maybe it isn't a great deal for Charlie Westcott and those friends of hers, but it's a good deal for you, dear."

Westy sat on the edge of the bed half listening, his eyes brimming. And it is odd, when you come to think of it, that no one save a rough farm-hand with an exceedingly varied and checkered career, had ever taken particular notice of a certain quality in those gray eyes.

"Oh, my dear," said Mrs. Martin with deep sympathy and affection, "I'm so sorry, so sorry for the whole thing. Your father should never have suggested your going to work on the farm. Now he says he never wants to hear the Yellowstone mentioned. Doris says she thinks we may have to take

the yellow vase from the parlor because it will remind him of the Yellowstone——”

“I don’t mind,” said Westy, getting command enough of himself to speak. “I had fun working and I don’t mind about the hundred dollars.”

“And it was so noble and straightforward of you to tell your father what you had done. I told him if he had only given you a chance you might have explained. I told him that perhaps the deer was chasing you and intended to kill you.”

Westy smiled ruefully.

“Was it?” his mother ventured to ask.

“No, deers don’t run after people,” Westy said.

“Well, I don’t know anything about them,” said his mother resignedly.

“It’s all right, mom,” said Westy.

“I’m only sorry you ever went up there,” mused Mrs. Martin. “But I want you to promise me, dearie, that you won’t say another word about it to your father; don’t speak about Yellowstone Park either, because he feels very strongly about the whole thing.”

“I won’t,” said Westy.

“You know, dear,” Mrs. Martin observed with

undeniable truth, "I've known your father longer than you have. We must just say nothing and let the whole matter blow over. Very soon he'll be angry about his income tax and then he'll forget about this summer. He thinks that your Uncle Dick shouldn't have such men about his place as that horrible Ira, as you call him. He blames that man more than you. He says that farms are hiding places for good-for-nothing scoundrels who can't get employment elsewhere."

"Ira isn't a scoundrel," said Westy.

"Well, he stole a king, and I'm sure a man that steals a king isn't a gentleman."

There seemed no answer to this. But Westy moved closer to his mother and let her put her arm about him.

"Now, dearie, it's all over," she said, "and it was a horrible nightmare and I'm proud of my boy because he was straightforward and honest—and I'm sure your father is too. But he's very queer and we mustn't cross him. So now we'll forget all about it and I've something to tell you. Pee-wee Harris——"

At the very mention of this name Westy laughed.

For Pee-wee Harris, present or absent, spread sunshine in the darkest places. But never in a darker place than in Westy's room that night of his return from his summer's vacation.

"They're back from camp, then?" he asked.

CHAPTER XIX

PEE-WEE ON THE JOB

"YES, they're back," said Mrs. Martin, "and Pee-wee was here last evening and talked steadily for two hours. He told me to tell you to come to scout meeting to-morrow and vote——"

"Vote? What for?"

"I don't know, it's something about an award," said Westy's mother. "The Rotary Club has offered some kind of an award for scouts, that's all I know. He told me to tell you to be sure to come and vote. He said it's a special meeting at Roy's house and they're going to have refreshments."

"They won't have any when he gets through," said Westy wistfully.

"I'm so glad," said his mother, rising, "that you can plunge right into your scout work and forget all about this dreadful summer. At the seashore we were very much disappointed, the gnats were terrible. I'm glad we're all home and that it's over. Doris did

nothing but dance and she's lost eight pounds instead of gaining."

"All right, mom," said Westy, letting his mother kiss him good night. "I'm glad I'm home too; I'll be glad to see the troop. It makes me feel good just to hear you mention Pee-wee."

"I'm sure he'll cheer you up," said Mrs. Martin. "I don't know what to think about what he says—I'm sure he always tells the truth."

"Oh, yes, but sometimes he stands on his head and tells it so it's upside down," laughed Westy; "that's what Roy says."

"He says that Warde Hollister found some sort of a job for a woman up near camp so that the woman won't have to send her little child to the orphan asylum. He ran five miles through a swamp, Walter says. I hope to goodness he had his rubbers on."

"Was it a boy or a girl—the child, I mean?" Westy asked.

"I'm sure I don't know, but I think the father is in jail. Anyway, the boys want you to vote for Warde. Now will you promise me you'll go to sleep?"

Westy promised, and kept his promise that time at

all events. If he had known all there was to know about these matters perhaps he would not have fallen asleep so easily.

He did not have to wait until the following evening, for the next morning Pee-wee Harris (Raven and mascot) arrived like a thunder-storm and opened fire at once upon Westy.

"Now you see what you get for going somewhere else and I'm glad I'm not sorry for you, but anyway I'm sorry you weren't there because we had more fun at Temple Camp this summer than ever before and we're going to have the biggest hero scout in our troop and his picture is going to be in *Boys' Life* and his name is going to be in the newspapers and I bet you don't know who it is, I bet you don't!"

"Is it you?"

"Why?"

"Because you said the *biggest*."

"Listen, you have to be sure to come to scout meeting to-night—they're going to have refreshments, but that isn't the reason, but anyway you have to be sure to come and I'll tell you why—listen. You know good turns? Listen! The Rotary Club—my father's a member of it—listen!—they offered a prize to the scout that did the biggest good turn in-

volving resources and powers—I mean prowess, that's what it said, during this summer. Only the scout has to be in a troop in this county, that's the only rule.

“Every troop in the county has a right to vote who did the biggest good turn in the troop and then they send the name of that scout to the Rotary Club and those men have a committee to read the reports sent from all the different troops and then they decide which scout out of all those scouts did the biggest good turn. All the good turns are big ones because if they're not they don't get to the league and they decide which is the biggest of all the big ones and then—listen! *Listen! The scout that gets elected by those men gets a free trip to Yellowstone Park next summer and all his expenses are paid, candy and sodas and everything.* And after they elect him they're going to have a banquet. And do you know who's going to the Yellowstone? Warde Hollister.”

“You mean they've voted already?” Westy asked.

“No, not till next Saturday night, but anyway we're going to elect him and send his name in and when you hear what he did you'll vote for him all right and I bet you'll be proud he's in your patrol.

You needn't ask me what he did because you have to come and find out and there's going to be ice cream, too. So will you be there?"

"You bet," said Westy, smiling, "but how about other troops all over the county? They haven't been asleep all summer."

"Gee whiz, what do we care?" said Pee-wee.

"You'd better not be too sure," Westy laughed.

"I bet you—I bet you a soda Warde's the one to go," vociferated Pee-wee.

"All right," said Westy.

"Do you bet he won't?" Pee-wee demanded incredulously. "*A feller in your own patrol?*"

"They've got some pretty good scouts over in Little Valley," said Westy.

"What do we care? You just wait. Will you surely be there—up at Roy's?"

"You bet," said Westy.

CHAPTER XX

SOME NOISE

It was good to see the familiar faces once again, to hear Roy's banter and Pee-wee's vociferous talk. And now that he was back among them, the summer did indeed seem like a nightmare, a thing to be forgotten. It was not hard for Westy to forget his disgrace (or at least to put it out of his thoughts) in the merry, bustling troop atmosphere.

They met in the barn at Roy's house up on Blakeley's Hill, where a fine troop meeting room had been fixed up, with electric lights and a radio that never worked.

"Allow me to introduce the honorable Westy Martin," shouted Roy, standing on the old kitchen table which his mother had donated to the cause of scouting; "Silver Fox in good standing except when he's sitting down. Hey, Westy, we're going to have refreshments on account of all being so fresh, that's what my father says—I should worry. Hey, Westy,

Pee-wee says next summer you're going to take your rifle to Coney Island and shoot the chutes—he's so dumb he thinks chutes are wild animals."

"Next summer I'm going away with the troop," said Westy.

"The pleasure is ours," Roy shouted. "We can stand it if you can. Temple Camp wasn't like the same place without you—it was better. Did you hear about Warde, how he's going to get his head in the fly-paper, I mean his face in the newspaper? He's already rejected by an overwhelming majority."

"I don't know anything but what Pee-wee told me," said Westy, speaking as much to Warde as to Roy, "but I'm for you all right."

"And you ought to be proud of your patrol," said the genial, familiar voice of Mr. Ellsworth, their scoutmaster, trying to reach Westy with his hand.

"Hurrah for the Silver-plated Foxes," shouted Roy.

"If the leader of the Silver-plated Foxes will give me the floor for a few minutes," laughed Mr. Ellsworth, "we can get down to business and then——"

"Have the refreshments," shouted Pee-wee. "Everybody sit down."

"Also shut up," shouted Roy.

"Also listen," said Mr. Ellsworth.

"Absolutely, positively," said Roy. "First let's give three cheers on account of Westy being back, I mean three groans."

"Then," said Mr. Ellsworth, "as our sprightly leader of the Silver Foxes would say, let's have a large chunk of silence——"

"And very little of that," shouted Roy.

"You're crazy," shouted Pee-wee.

"We're proud of it," shouted Roy.

"Shut up, everybody," shouted Doc Carson.

"How can I shut up when I wasn't saying anything?" thundered Pee-wee.

"Shut up, anyway," shouted Roy. "Three cheers for Westy Martin down off the farm. How are the pigs, Westy?"

"Pretty well, how are all *your* folks?" Westy was inspired to answer.

"No sooner said than stung," said Roy. "If I said anything I'm sorry for I'm glad of it."

"Suppose you say nothing at all," laughed Mr. Ellsworth.

"The pleasure is mine," said Roy, subsiding.

"Scouts," said Mr. Ellsworth, having gained the floor at last. "This is a special meeting for a pur-

pose which you all know about except Westy——”

“I told him!” shouted Pee-wee.

“And he will become familiar with the matter as we proceed,” Mr. Ellsworth continued. “As all of us know, the Rotary Club of Bridgeboro has done a very splendid and public-spirited thing. This organization has offered a reward to the scout of Rockvale County who shall be selected as the one who has done the most conspicuous good turn during the summer. This award, as we know, is a free trip to the Yellowstone National Park, where a national jamboree for Boy Scouts is to be held.

“Special stress was laid upon one or two requirements which would lift the good turn out of the class of simple every-day kindness and helpfulness to others. That is, as I understand it, the winning good turn must have something in the way of heroism in it. I don’t mean simply physical heroism, of course, but heroism of soul, if I might put it so. Sacrifice, courage—I think we all know what is meant.

“According to the printed letter received by our troop (and by every troop in the county, I suppose) it is our privilege to select by vote the scout among us who has done the most conspicuous good turn.

On last Monday, Labor Day, the period for performance of such good turn closed. In accordance with the printed letter received we had an informal vote and decided that Warde Hollister of the Silver Fox Patrol is entitled to the award, so far as our troop is concerned. There was only one absent member and that was Westy Martin. This, of course, we all know and I'm just running over the matter so that our action may be thoroughly understood and deliberate.

"In accordance with requirements I, as scoutmaster of a contesting troop, have written a report embodying the deed or exploit which Warde did and which we purpose to present to these gentlemen for their consideration. I am now going to read this for the approval of all of you and when I have finished I shall ask all of you to sign it. Your signatures will be your votes, and in this sense they will be perfunctory, as we have already had an unanimous vote. If any of you scouts want to criticize or add anything to my description of the exploit, sing out and don't hesitate."

"I will," shouted Pee-wee at the top of his voice.

CHAPTER XXI

ONE GOOD TURN

MR. ELLSWORTH unfolded a typewritten paper and read. Westy listened with the greatest attention, for he was the only one who did not already know of his scout brother's exploit.

"The First Bridgeboro New Jersey Troop, B. S. A. respectfully submits to the Rotary Club of this town, the following report of an exploit performed by one of its scouts, Warde Hollister, while at Temple Camp, New York, on the ninth of August this year. This report is made under supervision and guidance of William C. Ellsworth of Bridgeboro, who is officially registered at National Headquarters as scoutmaster of said troop. Conclusive corroborative evidence is readily available to substantiate truthfulness of this report and will be procured and transmitted if desired.

"Whatever may be the issue in this contest, this troop wishes to express its appreciation of the inter-

est and kindness which the Rotary Club has shown to the whole scout membership of this county, and indirectly to the whole great brotherhood of which this troop is a part."

"Gee, but that's dandy language," shouted Pee-wee.

"Unfortunately the award is not for fine language," said Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth continued reading, "On the date mentioned, Warde Hollister, a scout of the first class, was hiking in the neighborhood of Temple Camp and stopped in a small and humble shack to ask directions——"

"Tell how they gave him a drink of milk," shouted Pee-wee.

"The people were very poor," Mr. Ellsworth read on, "and the mother, a widow, was on the point of sending her little child, a boy of six, to an orphanage, prior to seeking work for herself in the countryside. She seemed broken-hearted at this prospect and was much overcome as she talked with Scout Hollister. The woman's name is Martha Corbett and her home is, or was, on the road running past Temple Camp into Briarvale."

"There's an apple orchard near it," shouted Pee-wee.

Mr. Ellsworth read on, "That night at Temple Camp, Scout Hollister heard that a wealthy lady living at King's Cove, about seven miles from Temple Camp in a direct line, was leaving for New York by auto that night. This information was imparted to him by the lady's son who was a guest at Temple Camp. The lady, Mrs. Horace E. Hartwell, whose husband is well known in financial circles, intended, among other errands in the city, to secure a female servant for her country home at King's Cove.

"It was known that she would motor to New York late that evening and Scout Hollister, hoping to secure employment for the Corbett woman, tried to get her on the telephone. He had reason to believe from conversation with her son that the Corbett woman might prove available for service if communication could be had with Mrs. Hartwell before her departure for New York.

"Unable to get the Hartwell place by telephone, Hollister decided to go personally to King's Cove by a short cut through the woods. To do this it

was necessary for him to cross a swamp causing much difficulty to the traveler. Hollister covered the entire distance of six miles (including this swamp) in less than two hours, a very remarkable exploit in the way of speed and endurance, and did, in fact, reach King's Cove in time to intercept the Hartwell auto which had already started for New York. It was only by taking the difficult short cut and traversing the dangerous swamp that Hollister was able to do this.

"Hollister made himself known to Mrs. Hartwell as one of the scouts at Temple Camp and was the means of suspending her efforts to obtain a servant in New York until he should have an opportunity to bring Mrs. Corbett to see her.

"The sequel of this exploit was that Mrs. Corbett and her young child were taken into the Hartwell home which seems likely to be a permanent refuge for both.

"It is respectfully submitted to the Rotary Club that this good turn contains both of the elements required for the winning of the Yellowstone award, viz., generosity of purpose and prowess in the consequent exploit."

"How about that, scouts, all right?" Mr. Ells-

worth concluded. "Anybody want to add anything?"

"Three cheers for Warde Hollister!" two or three scouts shouted instinctively.

"Oh, boy, we're going to have a trip to Yellowstone Park in our troop!" vociferated Pee-wee.

"Will you send me some post cards from there?"

"Three cheers for the Silver Foxes," shouted Roy; "we thank you."

"You make me tired, *you* didn't do it!" shouted Pee-wee. "Any one would think you were the one that did it, to hear you shout."

"I'm the one that had the responsibility," Roy shot back; "he's in my patrol."

"How about *you*, Warde?" Mr. Ellsworth laughed. "All O. K.?"

"Sure it's O. K.," shouted Pee-wee; "it's dandy language."

"It sounds kind of too——" Warde began.

"No, it doesn't," Pee-wee shouted.

"Well, anyway," Warde laughed, "I'd like to say this if I can have a word——"

"Help yourself," said Roy, "Pee-wee has plenty of them."

"I don't care anything about seeing my name in

the papers," said Warde. "I never thought much about Yellowstone Park but I guess I'd like to go there all right. I don't think so much of that stunt now that it's written down. But if it wins out I'll be glad; I'll be glad mostly on account of the troop——"

"Won't you be glad on account of the grizzly bears?" thundered Pee-wee.

"Sure," Warde laughed, "but I'll be glad mostly because we have—you know—an honor in our troop. I like this troop better than Yellowstone Park. Anyhow this is all I want to say; I hope you fellows won't be disappointed if I—if we don't get it."

"What do you mean *don't get it?*?" Pee-wee roared.

"I mean just that," Warde laughed, as he tousled Pee-wee's curly hair. "I hope we get it, but I'm not going to worry about it. And if we do get it I'll be glad on account of the troop. I always stuck to the troop; I could have gone to Europe last summer but I wanted to go away with the troop. And if I do—if I *should*—go out to the Yellowstone this is the way it will be with me; I'll feel as if I'm going for the troop."

"That's the way to talk," said Mr. Ellsworth briskly.

"I was just going to talk that way," thundered Pee-wee.

"Mr. Ellsworth saved us just in time," said Roy. "Young Faithful was going to spurt again. He's got Old Faithful Geyser tearing its hair with jealousy. Old Faithful spurts every hour, he spurts twice a minute."

"Well," laughed Mr. Ellsworth, "if this report strikes you all right, suppose you all put your names to it."

"I'll put mine first," shouted Pee-wee.

It was not until after Westy Martin had signed his name that he had an opportunity of seeking out Warde and talking with him alone. How the hero escaped Pee-wee would be difficult to explain; probably that hero-maker was detained by a prolonged encounter with the refreshments. Warde, always modest, was glad enough to get away from the clamorous throng and walk part way home with Westy, whom he had not seen all summer.

CHAPTER XXII

WARDE AND WESTY

"I SAID it was the troop I was thinking about," Warde observed, "but I guess it's really that kid I'm thinking about as much as anything."

"You mean Mrs. Corbett's kid?" Westy asked.

"No, Pee-wee, Young Faithful. Huh, that's a pretty good name for him, hey?"

"He's all there," Westy said.

"*He's* not going to Yellowstone," said Warde. "Not even a member of his patrol is. Yet, by golly, here he is standing on his head on account of me."

"Yop, that's him all right," said Westy.

"How'd you make out this summer?" Warde asked. "We got a couple of cards from you up at camp. Who's that fellow in the snap-shot you sent me?"

"Oh, he's a farm hand at my uncle's; he's been all over, on whaling cruises and everything. My father calls him a contemptible scoundrel because

he's—I don't know just why—because he's been a sort of tramp—I guess. He helped start a war in a South Sea island and they kidnapped the king."

"That sounds pretty good," said Warde.

"Now that we're all alone," said Westy, purposely avoiding the subject of his own summer, "I want to tell you that was some stunt you did. I signed my name and I signed it good and black; I think I broke my fountain pen."

"I'll bring you one from the Yellowstone," Warde laughed; "if I go," he added.

"I think you'll go all right," said Westy. "You know how it is, Hollie, when a fellow gets home after being away; everybody seems kind of strange. That's the way it seemed with me to-night; that's why I didn't say much, I guess. But now that I'm seeing you all alone I'll tell you that that was one peach of a thing you did. I'm expecting to get post cards from you next summer showing the petrified forests and Inspiration Point and the Old Faithful Inn and all those places—you see."

"You seem to know all about them," said Warde.

"Sure," said Westy, with a note of wistfulness in his voice. "I've read a lot about it; I was—eh—There's another thing I want to say to you while

we're alone. You said you didn't go to Europe last summer so you could be with the troop. You said the troop always comes first with you. I guess you didn't mean that as a shot at me, did you? Because I went away somewhere else this summer?"

"What are you talking about?" Warde laughed, as he rapped Westy on the shoulder and then gave him a shove almost off the sidewalk. "That's you all over, everybody says so; you're so gol blamed sensitive. I wouldn't answer such a crazy question."

"Because I've got the same idea that you have," said Westy. "I'm always wishing I could do something for the troop; the troop comes first with me, you can bet. But, gee, I never seem to be able to do anything. Look at Roy, his father gave the barn——"

"Come out of that," laughed Warde. "Tell me what you were doing all summer. We had *some* summer at Temple Camp."

"Oh, I don't know," said Westy, "nothing in particular. I went for a special reason and I guess it didn't pan out very well. I should worry about it, because anyway it's all over. I don't want to talk about it."

Warde glanced curiously at him but said nothing.

"You can bet I'm going to camp with you fellows next summer," Westy said. "Only probably *you* won't be there."

"Oh, don't be too sure of that," Warde laughed. "There are a few other troops to be heard from, Westy, old boy."

"Well, I'd like to see that award given to our troop," Westy mused. "I don't suppose it makes much difference who goes. If I had to choose a fellow to go it would be you, and I did vote for you, you can bet. But as long as our troop gets the honor it doesn't make much difference who goes. I'm glad I got back in time to vote. Gee williger, I'm proud to vote for a stunt like that—and I'm glad you're in my patrol. That's about all I'm good for, I guess—to vote."

"Who taught me to hit a bull's eye?" Warde asked. "What are you doing to-morrow?" he broke off suddenly. "Come ahead over to my house and we'll try a few cracks at the target; what do you say?"

"Huh," Westy mused wistfully. "I guess I'll have to be getting ready for school to-morrow. I've got to unpack my trunk, too."

"We'll see you Saturday night then? At the Rotary Club?"

"Will they let people go?" Westy asked.

"Sure, the more the merrier," said Warde; "it's a public meeting."

"I'll come and shout for you when they announce the decision," Westy said.

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," laughed Warde.

CHAPTER XXIII

IRA GOES A-HUNTING

WHEN Westy strode away after making his sensational announcement at the farm, Ira Hasbrook watched the departing figure through a dense cloud of tobacco smoke. He was puzzled. For a while he smoked leisurely, submitting with languid amiability to the tirade of Aunt Mira. And when she finally withdrew to the sitting room to write to Bridgeboro he continued smoking and thinking for fully half an hour. Only once in all that time did he make any audible comment.

"Some kid," he mused aloud.

It would be hard to say whether this comment was in approval of Westy's sudden inspiration to kill a deer or in perplexity as to what he actually had done. Certainly Ira would not have held it to the boy's discredit if he had killed a deer. He rather liked Westy's unexplained decision to reform and kill a deer. With such a fine beginning

he might some day even go after an Indian or run away to sea. Ira was greatly amused at the naïve way in which Westy had suddenly come out into the open as a lawless adventurer. . . .

But he was puzzled. For one thing it seemed odd to him that Westy, directly after his bizarre exploit, should have chanced upon Luke Meadows, the leading poacher of the neighborhood and the bane of farmers and game wardens for miles around.

Ira's attitude with respect to Westy's sensational confession was not the moral attitude.

"I'll be gol darned, I don't believe he did it," he mused. His thought seemed to be that it was too good to be true.

He slowly drew himself to his feet, pulled his outlandish felt hat from its peg, refilled his pipe, and sauntered over into the woods where he soon hit the trail which formed the short cut to Chandler. He had not walked fifteen minutes when he heard voices and presently came upon a little group of people gazing at the carcass of the deer. Terry, the game warden, and Farmer Sands were very much in evidence.

"What cher goin' to do with him; drag him out?"

Ira inquired without wasting any words in greeting.

"H'lo, Iry," said the game warden. "Work of the boy scouts; pretty good job, huh?"

"Yere, so he was tellin' me," drawled Ira. "Plunked him right in the bean, huh?"

"Who was tellin' yer?" inquired Farmer Sands with aggressive shrewdness.

"The kid," drawled Ira.

"Yer don't mean he come back and told yer?" Farmer Sands inquired incredulously.

"Uh huh, work of the boy scouts," said Ira. "I was thinkin' he might 'a been lyin' only I don't believe he knows how ter lie any more'n he knows how to shoot. Got a match, Terry?"

Ira leisurely lighted his unwilling pipe and proceeded in his lazy way to examine the carcass.

"Plunked him twice, huh—one under the belly there."

Ira wandered about, kicking the bushes while the men fixed a rope about the head of the carcass.

"I s'pose you know all 'bout what happened then, if the boy went back to the farm?" Terry called to him.

"Me?" Ira answered. "Naah, I don't know

nuthin 'bout what happened. I know the kid lost a hundred dollars he was savin' up. This here tobacco package b'long to you, Terry?"

"Where'd you find that?" Terry called.

"Over here in the bushes. Me and you never smoked such mild tobacco as Mechanical Delights or whatever it is. Howling Bulldog Plug Cut for us, hey? Do you need any help, you men? Prob'ly the kid was smokin' Mechanical Delights and didn't know what he was doin', that's my theory. He couldn't see through the smoke."

He stuffed the empty tinfoil package into his pocket and started ambling through the woods toward Barrett's.

"Thar's the man 'at's to blame fer this here vilashun of the law," said Farmer Sands shrewdly. "Him's the man 'at turned that thar youngster's head—I tell yer that, Terry."

"Like enough," said Terry. "Him and that scoutin' craze."

"Maybe it was the scouting craze that made him tell the truth," said a bystander, evidently a city boarder in the neighborhood. "It seems a queer thing that a young boy should break the law and shoot big game and then go and give himself up."

"No, 'tain't nuther," said Farmer Sands. "He got sceered, that's why he *confessed*. He was sceered outer his skin soon as he clapped eyes on me an' Terry. You can't fool me, by gum! I see jes haow it was the minute I set eyes on the little varmint!"

But he hadn't seen how it was at all. Nor had Terry seen how it was. For the explanation of this whole business was locked up in that dungeon of mysteries in Mr. Martin's library. It had been under their very noses and they had not so much as examined it. And now it was in that closet of dark traditions away off in Bridgeboro, under the grim and autocratic guard of Westy's father. And there it remained until a stronger man than Mr. Martin ordered him to bring it out.

CHAPTER XXIV

CLEWS

IRA ambled along through the woods, emerging at Barrett's where the dubious rumors of his past career always assured him a ready welcome. He had never been of the Barrett's set, preferring the quiet of the farm, and the adventurous game of quietly plaguing Aunt Mira. But they knew him for a former sailor and soldier of fortune (or ill-fortune) and they respected him for the dark traditions which were associated with his name.

He sauntered along the shabby little street till he came to the house of Luke Meadows. He had no better plan than just a quiet tour of observation and inquiry. He intended to chat with Luke. But his curiosity had been greatly enlivened since he had seen the deer.

But at Luke's house he was doomed to surprise and disappointment. The alien had gone away with his little girl. There had been no furniture worth

moving and the westerner's few portable belongings (so the loiterers said) had been taken in a shabby bag.

Luke had not vouchsafed his neighbors any information touching the cause of his departure or his destination. There was a picture, unconsciously and crudely drawn by "Missie Ellis," the neighbor to whose care Meadows had consigned his little daughter just before the scout had saved him from arrest and jail. She seemed a motherly person, well chosen by the man who, in his extremity, had thought only of his little daughter.

"I see them go," said Mrs. Ellis, "and he was carryin' her in one arm and the bag in the other. They went up the road toward Dawson's and I says to my man, I says, sumpin is wrong and they've gone to git the train. The county men was allus after him, houndin' him and houndin' him; Lord knows, I never knew him to do no harm but shoot game. And the little kiddie, she was the livin' image of her mother. I nursed the poor woman when she died of the flu and Luke he jes stood there by the bed and lookin' at her and sayin' not a word. Even after she went not a word did he say.

"She was out of her head, she was, and she was

sayin' how they were back in Cody where they came from and he says, 'Yes, mommy, we'll go back; soon as you can travel we'll go back.' They was strangers here; I guess they was allus thinkin' and frettin' about their big wild west. He says once how he could see miles of prairies, poor man. Sech eyes as he had! Seemed as if he could see across miles of prairies.

"To-day he had some trouble with Terry again. I don't know what it was all about, but there was a youngster over here, a fine likely lookin' young lad and they took him away to Chandler. I says to my man, they've gone to make the poor, frightened boy tell something and then come back an' arrest Luke. So I guess he goes away while it was yet time—Lord knows what it was all about."

Ira walked through the poor, little, deserted house and even he was touched by its bareness. Curious, gossipy neighbors accompanied him, commenting upon the brown, taciturn man who had gone and taken away with him the one thing of value that he possessed, his little girl. If he had gone for fear Westy might weaken, under some rustic third degree, and incriminate him, he might have saved himself the slight inconvenience of a hasty depar-

ture. The scout who had seen to it that the little motherless girl and her father were not parted, was not likely to say one word more than he intended to say to the authorities or to any one else.

One thing Ira did find in the little house which interested him. This was a collection of as many as a dozen empty tinfoil packages on the wooden shelf above the cooking stove. According to the labels they had contained Mechanic's Delight Plug Cut tobacco.

CHAPTER XXV

A BARGAIN

IRA did not see anything remarkable in Westy's having shot the deer twice. He was surprised and amused at the boy, having shot it once; it had caused him to regard Westy as a youthful hero of the true dime novel brand. But he had not much respect for Westy's skill as a marksman. And he was quite ready to believe that two shots had been required to "drop" the deer. Six or eight shots would not greatly have surprised him.

What puzzled him was the undoubted fact (established by the telltale tobacco package) that Luke Meadows had very lately been in the neighborhood of the killing. He had not attached any particular significance to this package until he had seen similar packages in Luke's deserted home. Now he found himself wondering how Westy had happened to be at Luke's house, and why Luke had so suddenly gone away.

The true explanation of the whole business never occurred to Ira. That anybody could voluntarily make the sacrifice that Westy had made was not within the range of his conception. Probably he had never done a mean thing in all his checkered career. But, on the other hand, he had probably never done anything very self-sacrificing. To kidnap a barbarous king was certainly not the act of a gentleman (as Westy's mother had observed) but it was not *mean*. . . .

The nearest that Ira's cogitations brought him to the truth was his suspicion that somehow or other Westy and Luke Meadows had both been involved in the lawless act of killing and that Westy (being the financier of the pair) had been frightened into taking the blame. In this case it seemed likely enough that Luke (aware of his dubious reputation) would depart before Westy should have time to weaken and incriminate him. This was about the best that he could do with the rather puzzling circumstances, and several pipefuls of Howling Bulldog Plug Cut were required to establish this theory.

He had no intention of reopening the unhappy subject with Aunt Mira. It pleased him to have her

believe that Westy was a daring and law-defying huntsman. And the whole matter would probably have died out of his own mind in the preoccupation of his farm duties, save for two incidents which restored his curiosity and revived his interest. Both of these happened the next day, Saturday.

On that afternoon, Ira took the milk cans to the little station at Dawson's and stopped in the post office on the way back. The postmaster, Jeb Speyer, handed him a letter or two and a rolled up newspaper addressed to Aunt Mira. On the wrapper of this newspaper were written the words *marked copy* and Ira contemplated the address and the postmark with that ludicrous air of one who seldom reads.

"Guess it's from that youngster yer had daown t'h' farm," commented Mr. Speyer; "Bridgeberry, hain't it? That youngster oughter be walloped, and by gol, I'd be th' one ter do it, I tell yer; shootin' up th' woods outer season."

"Well, I d'no," drawled Ira, ruefully. "I'd kinder think twice 'fore I'd wallop that kid. He jes soon shoot yer down as look at yer; shot a school teacher fer givin' him a bad mark last winter, I heerd."

"*I want ter know!*" ejaculated Mr. Speyer.

"Yer got ter handle that kid with gloves," said Ira. "He expects to be a train robber when he grows up. Let's have a paper of tobaccy, Jeb."

"What yer reckon's become of Luke Meadows, Iry?" Jeb asked.

"Him? Oh, I s'pect the kid killed him and hid him away somewheres. The whole truth o' that business ain't out yet, Jeb."

"Think so, huh?" said Jeb shrewdly.

"There's queer things 'bout it," said Ira darkly.

On the way home he paused at the house of Terry, the game warden. He had no object in doing this but Terry's little house was on the way and the game warden was nailing the deerskin to the barn door, so Ira stopped to chat. Terry was the terror of game law violators the county over, but he was a thrifty soul, and benefited so much by illegal killings as to sell deer and fox skins to the market. Thus poor Luke Meadows put money in the pocket of Terry, the game warden. Ira's broad code of morals was not opposed to this sort of thing and he stood by, chatting idly with Terry about the value of the skin.

"I got the bullets, I got the bullets," said Terry's scrawny little daughter, exhibiting them proudly in

the palm of her outstretched hand. "See? I got the bullets."

Half-interested, and more to please the child than for any other reason, Ira glanced at the bullets. Then, suddenly, he took them in his own hand and examined them closely.

What interested him about them was that they were not alike.

"These outer the deer, Terry?" he asked.

"Yop, 'n' don't you put 'em in yer mouth nuther," said Terry, addressing the child instead of Ira. "Them's poison, them is."

"I tell yer what I'll do," said Ira, fumbling in his pockets. "You give me them bullets and I'll give you ten cents an' yer can buy ice cream and lolly-pops and them ain't poison, are they, Terry?"

Terry was too engrossed to review this proposition, but the child complied with alacrity.

"Now me an' you is made a bargain," said Ira. "An' if I get hungry I can chew up the bullets 'cause poison don't hurt me. Once down in South Americy when I deserted from a ship I et poison toads when I was hidin' from cannibals; you ask Auntie Miry if that ain't so. Ain't that so, Terry?"

"Reckon it must be," said Terry, preoccupied.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MARKED ARTICLE

HERE then was one undoubted fact; the deer had been shot by two different guns. Ira cogitated upon this fact and tried to make up his mind what he would do next, or whether he would do anything. And probably he would not have done anything if it had not been for the newspaper which he delivered to Aunt Mira. She did not give him this to read for she still maintained a demeanor of coldness toward this arch-seducer. But he found the paper on the sitting room table and read the marked article.

“BRIDGEBORO SCOUTS CONTEST FOR ROTARY CLUB AWARD,” the heading declared. The article below ran:

“Great excitement prevails among our local scout troops as a result of the splendid offer of the Rotary Club of our town to send a scout to Yellowstone National Park next summer. This rare opportunity

is offered to the scout of Rockvale County who, in the opinion of the Club's Committee, performed the most conspicuous good turn during the past summer. Each of the three troops in Bridgeboro has elected a scout for this contest. All of the deeds presented for the league's consideration reflect great credit on the young heroes who performed them.

"The First Bridgeboro Troop, our oldest and largest local unit, presents Warde Hollister as candidate for the rare treat of a trip to the Yellowstone. Warde did a great stunt at Temple Camp during the summer involving both prowess and generous spirit and the First Troop scouts are moving heaven and earth to secure for him the award which will be a reflected honor to their splendid organization."

On the same page with this article was a blank area surrounding an advertisement and availing himself of this space, Westy had written:

DEAR AUNT MIRA:—

Maybe you'll be sorry I can't go to Yellowstone Park because I had to do something else with my money. Dad says for me to forget about going to Yellowstone. This article shows you how, sort of, I will go anyway probably. Because in a scout

troop all the scouts are sort of like one scout so if Hollie goes it will almost be the same as if I went, and I'll hear all about it anyway. So please don't feel sorry because I can't go to the Yellowstone. I had a dandy time at the farm. Give my regards to Ira.

WESTY.

When Ira had finished his unauthorized perusal he lighted his pipe. Ira could smoke and do anything else at the same time—except read. Reading required all his effort and when he read, his pipe always took advantage of his preoccupation to go out. When he had relighted it, he stuffed his hands as far down as possible in his trousers pockets and went out and gazed at the landscape. But he did not care anything about the landscape.

"He's—one—all round—little—prince," he mused aloud. "*He's jes one nat'ral born little prince!* They don't make 'em, that scout club, them as is like that jes has ter be born that way. By gol, I'd like ter know what the little rascal act'ally did do."

He came to the conclusion that what the little rascal had actually done was to collaborate with

Luke Meadows in the adventurous exploit of killing the deer and then allowed himself to be frightened into assuming all the guilt and paying the fine. Ira was artless enough, and ignorant enough of scouting, to believe that this in itself would constitute a claim upon the Rotary Club of Bridgeboro.

"I ain't gon to see no kid gon out to the Yellowstone without them gents knowin' 'bout this here," mused Ira. "I'm a-gon ter look inter this mess summat. I ain't satisfied with the looks o' things."

For a few minutes longer he stood, his back against the house, smoking and considering. Then, delving into the abysmal depths of his trousers pocket he disinterred a formidable nickel watch which was innocent of chain or cord. He had exchanged a carved whale's tooth for it in some oriental sea town and it was his pride and boast. If Ira himself had always been as regular as this miniature town clock no one would have complained.

"I got jes about enough time ter ketch the six-twenty from Dawson's," he said. "I'm gone ter hev a look at this here Bridgeboro."

This was as far as he was willing to commit himself. He would go in the rôle of idle tourist. There remained only one thing to do and that was to

saunter out to the kitchen porch and reach his outlandish felt hat down from the peg which had been intended for a milk pail. If he had been going to South Africa, he would have done no more than this. But he did pay Bridgeboro the tribute of banging his hat against a porch stanchion to knock the loose dust out of it. Then he sauntered up the road toward Dawson's.

CHAPTER XXVII

ENTER THE CONTEMPTIBLE SCOUNDREL

AT eight o'clock that evening, an evening destined to be memorable in the annals of local scouting, Ira Hasbrook stood upon the porch of the Martin home and, having pushed the electric button, knocked out the contents of his pipe against the rail preparatory to entering.

He wore khaki trousers which in some prehistoric era had been brown, a blue flannel shirt and an old strap from a horse harness by way of a belt. He was not in the least perturbed, but bore himself with an easy-going demeanor which had a certain quality that suggested that nothing less than an earthquake could ruffle it. He was not admitted to the house by the correct man servant and seemed quite content to wait on the porch until Mr. Martin (whom he purposed to honor with a call) should make known his pleasure touching the scene of their interview.

"You want to see me; what is it?" that gentleman demanded curtly.

"You Mr. Martin, huh? Westy's father?"

"Yes, sir, what can I do for you?"

"Well," drawled Ira, "you can do a turn fer him, mebbe; and that'll be doin' somethin' fer me. I'm down off the farm up yonder—up by Dawson's."

"Oh, you mean you work for Mr. Nelson?"

"By turns, when I'm in the country. The kid happen to be home?"

"No, sir, he's not," said Mr. Martin curtly, "but I think I've heard of you. What is your business here?"

"Well, I never was in no business exactly, as the feller says," Ira drawled out. "Kid's gone ter the meetin', huh?"

"I believe he has," said Mr. Martin briskly. "Did Mr. Nelson send you here? If there is anything you have to say to my son I think it would be better for you to say it to me."

"That's as might be," said Ira easily. "Would yer want that I should talk to yer here?"

Mr. Martin stepped aside to let the caller pass within. Ira wiped his feet but paid no other tribute, nor, indeed, paid the slightest heed to the rather

sumptuous surroundings in which he found himself. He followed the lord of the establishment into the library and seated himself in one of the big leather chairs. Mr. Martin did not trouble himself to present Ira when his wife and daughter (fearful of some newly disclosed sequel to Westy's escapade) stole into the room and unobtrusively seated themselves in a corner.

"Well, sir, what is it?" said Mr. Martin authoritatively.

"Well," drawled Ira, "it's 'bout yer son shootin' a deer."

"We know about that," said Mr. Martin coldly.

"Yer don't happen ter know if he used the rifle since, do you?"

At this there was an audible titter from Doris.

"Oh, yes, I know very well that he hasn't," said the official jailer, "I have it under lock and key."

"I'd like ter git a squint at that there gun."

"That would be impossible," said Mr. Martin.

"Yes?"

"Is there any claim that the gun doesn't belong to my son? That he——"

"There's a notion he ain't been tellin' the whole

gol blamed truth 'bout that there shootin' an' I'm here ter kinder look over the matter, as the feller says."

"Did you come here to charge my son with lying?"

"Well, as you might say, *no*. I come here ter charge him with bein' a little rascal of a prince. But *of* course if I thought he was a liar I'd tell 'im so and I'd tell you so. Jes the same as if I thought you was a fool or a liar I'd tell yer so."

"Isn't he perfectly splendid," Doris whispered in her mother's ear. "Isn't he picturesque? Oh, I think he's just adorable."

"Well, now, my man," said Mr. Martin, considerably jarred by his caller's frank declaration, "what is it? I think I've heard of you and I think if it wasn't for you that murderous toy wouldn't be locked up in that closet there." Ira glanced toward the family dungeon. "As I understand it, from what Mrs. Nelson says, you got my boy's head full of nonsense and he ran amuck. He told the truth and confessed it and lost a hundred dollars and his gun and a trip out west. And the gun's locked up in that closet where it will never do any

more harm. It will never shoot any more deer in season or out of season—I suppose you’ve shot them both ways.”

“Yes, sir, I have,” drawled Ira, “but I never used more than one gun at a time; I never dropped an animal with two different kinds of bullets like your boy did——”

Mr. Martin looked surprised.

“I was thinkin’,” said Ira, not giving Mr. Martin a chance to comment upon this mystery, “that maybe not knowin’ much ’bout guns and bein’ sceered of ’em—I can always mostly spot folks that’s daffy ’bout firearms—I was thinking maybe you was just crazy fool enough when you was mad ter lock that murderous toy up while it was loaded. *Of* course if you done that you can’t *exactly* say it won’t do no more harm.”

This was exactly what Mr. Martin had done and a titter from his daughter reminded him that he was at a slight disadvantage.

“I’d like ter see whether both shots has been fired outer that gun,” Ira drawled on. “I’d jes kind of sorter like to look it over. And while I’m at it, I’ll take out the cartridge that I think is still in it. Then it can’t bite. Maybe I’ll be able ter tell yer

somethin' or other when I get through. Now you jes get that gun out without any more foolin' around or else yer don't deserve ter be the father o' that kid. Get it out an' don't waste no more time; them gents is startin' a meetin' up yonder."

CHAPTER XXVIII

PROOFS

IRA HASBROOK took no notice of the tribute paid him by the mother and daughter and father who clustered about him evidently not in the least afraid of the gun now that it was in his hands. Even Mr. Martin contemplated it without a quiver. Upon the library table lay one cartridge. The other had done its good turn.

"Yer see this here is one of them repeaters," said Ira. "'Tain't goin' ter hurt yer. Yer see these here two cartridges I got in my pocket? They come outer the deer. They ain't the same size, yer see? Two guns. The one I jes took out matches that there little one outer my pocket. This here big one came outer another gun—that ain't no repeater. Now looka here, here's what tells the story—the gol blamed little rascal of a double barrel prince! Looka here—feel on the end of that barrel. Powder.

"Feel, mister, 'twon't bite yer. Yer know what that means? That means yer a proud father. I wasn't gone ter shake hands with yer, but gol blame it, I think I will! Feel it! Smell it! Powder, all right. That means your boy was—about—gol, that toy o' his wasn't six inches from that there deer when he shot it in the head." He scrutinized and felt of something near the end of the barrel. "Blood even! See that; that's a hair! I knowed I'd ketch the little rascal. *Mister, that boy o' yours shot that animal ter put it outer its suffering.*"

There was a moment's pause as they clustered about Ira where he stood near the library table squinting curiously at the end of the barrel and gingerly examining it with one finger. And only one sound broke the silence; that was when an almost inaudible "*oh*" of astonishment and admiration escaped from Doris. "It's wonderful," she said more clearly after a pause.

"Be sure yer sins'll find yer out, as the feller says," drawled Ira.

"If it hadn't been for you——" Mrs. Martin began.

"All right, mister," Ira laughed, "yer don't need

ter be scared of her, she's empty. The only thing's goner do any damage now is me. I'm goner shoot up th' Rotary Club. Now where's this here meetin' anyway? I'm a goner look it over."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RALLY

THE assembly hall of the Bridgeboro High School presented a gala scene. The whole thing had come about unexpectedly; it had been an "inspiration" as Pee-wee would have said. The local newspaper at the instigation of several public-spirited individuals and organizations of town, had stirred up a festival spirit in the interest of the Boy Scouts which must have surprised the kindly gentlemen of the Rotary Club who had certainly never expected that the award they had offered would be made the occasion of a public rally.

But Mrs. Gibson of the Woman's Club had seen the opportunity for a "real Scout night," and the giving of the coveted award had been hooked up with a well-planned rally. The Rotary Club was in it, the Woman's Club was in it, the Campfire Girls were in it, the Y.M.C.A. was in it, and Pee-wee Harris was in it. He was not only in it, he was all

over it. Most of the troops in the county had lately returned from their summer outings and they blew into Bridgeboro, tanned and enthusiastic. Not all troops had elected candidates for the great award, but all were interested. It was Scout Night in Bridgeboro.

"Our troop is going to sit in the front row," shouted Pee-wee; "and listen—everybody keep still—*listen*—when Warde gets called up on the stage—that's the way they're going to do—when he—shut up and listen—when he gets called up on the stage, don't start shouting till I do. When I shout——"

"I never heard you stop shouting," said Roy.

"I have to start in order to stop, don't I?" Pee-wee roared. "How can I shout without being still first?"

"How are you going to get still?" Roy shot back.

"You leave it to me," yelled Pee-wee. "Don't anybody shout till I do. Then when I start everybody shout—wait a minute—this is what you all have to shout:

Yell, yell, yell,
Yell, yell, yell,

Yell, yell, yell,
Yellowstone!

I invented it because it's got a lot of yells in it."

"He thinks Yellowstone Park is named after a yell," shouted Roy.

The First Bridgeboro Troop did sit in the front row and for a while Pee-wee was silent—while he finished eating an apple. The first six or eight rows were filled with scouts and their patrol pennants raised here and there made an inspiring and festive show. Behind them was the regular audience. On the stage a khaki tent had been pitched with logs piled outside it and a huge iron pot hanging over them upon a rough crane.

"Oh, boy, I wish that was filled with hunter's stew," Pee-wee whispered to Dorry Benton who sat next to him. "Yum, yum, I wish I was on that platform."

"He's so hungry he could eat an imitation meal," Dorry whispered to Roy.

"Tell him to wait till the curtain comes down with a roll and he can eat that," whispered Roy.

There was singing, and a high scout official from National Headquarters made a speech. The bronze

cross was given to one proud scout, the Temple life-saving medal to another. A patrol from Little Valley gave a skilful demonstration of first aid. The Boy Scout Band from Northvale played several pieces; they had a very snappy little band, the Northvale Troop.

Then, a scout was blindfolded and led to the tent. He promised to jump up as soon as he heard the least sound of approach. Then a barefooted scout stole up, while the audience waited in suspense, and had actually started removing the bandage from the other boy's eyes before the latter knew he was near. This brought great applause. The Camp-fire Girls sang in chorus and gave some interesting demonstrations. It was a pretty good program.

It was after ten o'clock when Mr. Atwater, of the Rotary Club, arose from among those seated on the stage and, drawing a batch of papers from his pocket, started to address the audience.

"Three cheers for the Rotary Club of Bridgeboro!" some one called. And three rousing cheers were given for that organization.

"Hurrah for Yellowstone Park!" one called.

"Hurrah for the scout that we don't know who

he is!" another shouted, and there was much laughter.

"Yes, we do know, too!" arose the thunderous voice of Scout Harris.

"We'll all know very soon," laughed Mr. Atwater, "if you'll give me a chance to speak."

A certain atmosphere of tenseness seemed to pervade the front rows of the assembly hall. Scouts became restless, there were whispering and demands for quiet. Mr. Atwater smilingly waited.

Then silence.

CHAPTER XXX

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

"My good friends," said Mr. Atwater, "Shakespeare tells us that some are born great and some have greatness thrust upon them. The Rotary Club seems to have greatness thrust upon it. In an evil moment, one of our members suggested giving a trip to the Yellowstone Park as a reward for the best scout good turn performed in this county during the past summer. Through the press scout troops were invited to elect members eligible, by reason of their deeds, to compete for this award. The Rotary Club had no expectation of being dragged into the light of day and fulfilling its promise before the multitude——"

"Don't you be scared," shouted Pee-wee.

"I think I can get through with it," laughed Mr. Atwater, amid much laughter. "I have seen much to-night and it is my pleasure and pride to put on a boy scout in the way of seeing more—that great,

vast wonderland of the west, the Yellowstone National Park! (Great applause.) To him that hath shall be given, as the Bible tells us. The Rotary Club cannot make a hero. But I think it can pick one. And that it has tried to do impartially, fairly. (Applause.)

"The trouble with the Boy Scouts in Rockvale County is that they have too many heroes; it isn't a question of finding one, but more a question of weeding them out. (Laughter.)

"When I was a boy I got a medal for washing my hands and face each day (including under my ears) and twice on Sundays. I kept up with that ordeal for a period of weeks and then I got the cleanliness medal—and lost it. I have always been sorry that I washed my hands and face each day—including under my ears. (Great laughter.) Because now I have nothing to show for it. (Cheers and uproarious laughter.)

"So when this proposition of an award came up I said, 'If we're going to give an award at all, let's give something that can't fall out of a boy's pocket. (Laughter.) Let's give something that he can't swap off for a jack-knife—something that the teacher can't take away from him.' "

"You said it!" shouted Pee-wee.

"When I was a kid (anticipatory laughter), a century or two ago, everything I had sooner or later fell into the hands of my teacher. (Broad smile from Principal Starky on the platform.) So I said let's give this young hero something he'll always have! Let's give him mountains, and geysers and forests and grizzly bears, and lots to eat——"

"Oh, boy!" said Pee-wee.

"And if anybody can get those things away from him let them have them."

If every laughing face in that audience had not been directed at the genial speaker who had captivated all, perhaps some might have noticed the boy who sat in silence looking wistfully at the speaker and listening intently.

As Mr. Atwater passed on to more serious talk, that boy's attention seemed to concentrate and become tense. He saw neither Roy on his right hand, nor Warde Hollister on his left, only the stage and the speaker, and he seemed to be in a sort of trance. Only once did he speak and that was when (under the spell of some alluring phrase of the speaker's) he said to Warde, "I hope you do get it, it's our

troop." Then he said to himself. "If it isn't my trip it's my troop." Further than this, no one, not even the restless and whispering Pee-wee, could draw his attention from the speaker.

"The Yellowstone National Park," Mr. Atwater continued, "is Uncle Sam's great playground. There you are welcome. The geysers jump up when they see you coming; the grizzly bears hug you to death. (Laughter.) You can shoot the rapids but you can't shoot anything else. You can leave your gun at home, young fellow, because that wonderland belongs to the deer just as much as it belongs to you. You can't kill deer in the Yellowstone."

Westy winced. Was the speaker looking at him? Of course not—foolish, sensitive boy. . . .

"Now, one of you scouts is going out to the Yellowstone next summer, on the Rotary Club of Bridgeboro. The amount of money you will have to take is just *not one cent!* You're going to stay there for a month and bang around—all expenses paid. You're going to come back and say that old Uncle Sam has some back-yard to play in. (Laughter.) You're going to get onto a friendly basis with forest rangers and bears, and deer, and trout fishing and what all. No medal! No gewgaw to sew

on your sleeve! No gold piece to buy candy with! Just a trip to Uncle Sam's Wonderland, the Yellowstone National Park! (Great applause.)

"Now who is going to have this trip? Six gentlemen and four ladies have decided and they're all here on the platform. (Applause.) And they did the best they could to decide. It becomes my duty now to announce the winner of this award. Edwin Carlisle of the Second Westboro Troop will please stand up."

CHAPTER XXXI

SHOOTIN' UP THE MEETIN'

A TENSE silence prevailed. Pee-wee gasped, speechless. Even the exuberant Roy stared. "*What do — you — know — about — that!*" Doc Carson whispered to Artie Van Arlen. As Westy had been staring spellbound all along, no turn in his thoughts was visible in his features. Warde Hollister, of all the boys in the troop, seemed unperturbed. Level-headed and sensible scout that he was, he had let the others do the hoping, and the shouting.

"We don't get it," whispered Dorry Benton.

"Look!" whispered Wig Weigand to Warde.

But the figure that came sauntering down the aisle was not Edwin Carlisle, the hero. A queer enough figure he looked in that representative assemblage in his faded trousers and blue flannel shirt. Rough, uncouth and unaccustomed to such environment, he still bore a certain air of serene heedlessness to all this pomp and circumstance, as if he were con-

cerned only with that which was really significant and vital. One could not say of him that he *seemed* at home, for that would be paying the place an unconscious tribute. His calm assurance and easy strength seemed to imply that the whole world was his home and that one place was much like another to him.

He paused half-way down the aisle and then for the first time the boys in the front row saw him, just as he began to speak. Westy Martin stared aghast like one seeing a ghost and his heart thumped in his throat as he listened.

"I d'no's I oughter speak out 'n meetin', as the feller says, but I got somethin' ter say in this here jamboree."

A silence like the silence of the grave followed. One astonished girl (it might have been Doris Martin) said something undistinguishable in an amazed, audible whisper.

"I been in the Yallerstone," drawled the speaker, "an' I like what you said—you gent. But I'm interested in somethin' bigger 'n the Yallerstone an' that's a kid yer got here. He's big enough ter make the Yallerstone look like one er them there city

grass-plots I see. I'm talkin' ter you, mister, an' before you go ter makin' any plunge yer better listen. I was goner speak out when you says somethin' 'baout shootin' deer, but I didn'.

"I'm down off a farm up Dawson way owned by his uncle—this here kid I'm talkin' 'baout. And if he's settin' roun' here anywheres an' hears me tell any lies 'baout him he can up an' call me a liar. Then I'll let him have—jes—two—shots—that'll shut 'im up."

"Gracious!" Some lady said shuddering. "Is he a lunatic?"

"Two shots, one big and one little I got in my pocket and I'll tell him to his face that he's a little rascal of a prince. Yer happen ter be anywheres around, Westy?"

Silence, save for nervously fidgeting figures and people down in front turning and craning to see this strange apparition.

"Stand up, Westy, cause yer got ter go through with it and I'm down off the farm ter take care o' that. Some o' you youngsters make him stand up, wherever he is."

They made him stand up, and there he stood,

nervous, ashamed, gulping. He longed to be near Ira, to say "This is my friend," yet he could not bring himself even to look at him.

"There yer are—thanks, you boys. Now, mister, that there kid had a hunderd dollars saved up ter go to Yallerstone Park; he worked fer it, choring' roun' on the farm, helpin' me hayin' an' what all. He starts home with his hunderd dollars an' sees a deer in the woods what's been dropped but ain't killed—don't leave 'im sit down, you boys.

"Now, mister, he shoots that deer in the head and kills it ter end its sufferings. He don't know no more 'baout shootin' than a drunken maniac but at two or three inches he killed his deer. Afl right, mister. Then he goes ter Barrett's, a little settlement up our way. I d'no what he goes fer. But I'm thinkin' he goes ter see the man that shot that deer first off. Leastways, when that man got the blame like he deserved, this kid he up and says it was *him* killed the deer. So 'twas, the little rascal, but you see *how* 'twas. Well, he gets arrested an' he pays out his precious hunderd dollars and comes home and says *he* killed a deer and gets a good tongue lashin' and loses his gun, but he sticks fast.

"Now all I come here fer now is ter let you folks

in onter that stunt o' his an' ask you if he gets his trip to the Yallerstone that he cheated himself out of, or not. I don't know nuthin' 'baout kind turns 'cause I ain't never did none, but I wantter know if this here kid gets his trip out Yallerstone way or not. Now, if I'm lyin' he'll tell yer so, 'cause I understand these scout fellers don't lie. I jes wantter know if he gets his trip out Yallerstone way or not."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BOY EDWIN CARLISLE

CONSTERNATION reigned. In the front row, where the First Bridgeboro Troop sat, confusion prevailed. Pee-wee, in accordance with the old precept of "Off with the old love, on with the new," forgot for the moment Warde's chagrin and shouted uproariously for Westy.

"It's going to be in our troop anyway!" he yelled.
"It's just the same only different!"

And meanwhile, a trim-looking boy, Edwin Carlisle, was standing in the audience waiting patiently and smiling, somewhat embarrassed.

Mr. Atwater turned and conferred with his colleagues on the platform. Pee-wee, restrained by his nearest neighbors, subsided into silence. Westy (probably more utterly wretched than any one in the hall) tried to silence excited questioners. "Who is he?" "Is it true?" "Is he crazy?" "Did you ever see him before?" "I bet it's the truth!" These

and similar whispered comments were showered upon him and he could only keep looking about sheepishly, as if he were ashamed to have the spectators behold this fuss.

The boy, Edwin Carlisle, standing quietly among his sitting colleagues some distance off, made a rather pathetic picture. His was not an easy rôle but he bore himself with a demeanor of patience and good humor.

And meanwhile, the outlandish stranger who had "shot up" the meeting remained like a statue half-way down the aisle calmly awaiting an answer to his question. Once it seemed as if he were on the point of lighting his pipe, but he did not do that.

It was Mr. Atwater who put an end to this rather embarrassing interval.

"Just be seated—a few moments—my boy," he said, addressing the Carlisle boy. Then to Ira he said, "Suppose you come up here on the platform, my friend, if you don't mind; we'd like to speak with you."

Ira did not seem to mind. He ambled the rest of the way down the aisle, turned to the left past a troop of scouts who stared at him as if he were a trapper or a cowboy, and up the steps to the stage.

Then for the first time everybody saw him. Mrs. Ashly (conspicuous in the Woman's Club) arose as if on a sudden impulse and shook hands with him cordially. He looked out of place but not ill at ease. He had walked through the audience as a man might walk through a forest.

Scarcely was he on the platform when something happened. A rather large man, with a big, round, rugged face stood up in the audience. He was an elderly man and dangled a pair of glasses as he spoke.

"May I join you ladies and gentlemen on the platform?" he asked.

"You bet you may," came the genial response from Mr. Atwater. "If we had known you were there, Mr. ——"

"*It's Mr. Temple! It's Mr. Temple!*" whispered Pee-wee excitedly. "Oh, boy, it's Mr. Temple! Now there's going to be something doing—*shhh!*"

"Listen to who's saying *shhh!*" whispered Roy.

"*Shhhh*, there's going to be something doing, there's going to be something doing," said Pee-wee.

"There is," said Roy grimly. "You're going to be thrown out if you don't shut up."

CHAPTER XXXIII

MR. TEMPLE'S LUCKY NUMBER

MR. JOHN TEMPLE, philanthropist, founder of Temple Camp and friend of scouting, had evidently sensed a delicate and perhaps difficult situation, and had gone to the rescue. He was given a fine welcome on the stage and the burst of applause by the audience showed that his public spirit and generosity were well known.

Every town has its wealthy and distinguished citizen; the good work of such men lives after them in libraries and hospitals. Mr. Temple was Bridgeboro's most distinguished character—next to Pee-wee. And even Pee-wee paid him the compliment of declaring, "He buys more railroads every day than I do ice cream cones." If he did, he must have owned practically all the roads in the country.

After an interval of suspense, which was seen in an acute stage among the scouts, Mr. Atwater turned

to the audience and said, "Stand up again, Edwin Carlisle."

The demeanor of this Carlisle boy was scoutish in the highest degree. Many were already wondering what he had done to warrant his selection as the winner of the great award. He had been on the point of receiving it when Ira had "shot up" the meeting. He had stood patiently and cheerfully waiting while he saw the honor that was his slipping away from him with every sentence of Ira's drawling talk.

He had reseated himself with no sign of disappointment or resentment when told to do so. And now he stood again among his comrades, cheerful, willing, obedient. And there he stood with Yellowstone Park dangling before his eyes and knew not what to think, but seemed content to abide by the issue. Mr. Temple had seen him (shrewd man that he was he had watched him amid the tumult when no one else had watched him) and Edwin Carlisle, scout of Westboro, was safe.

After a little while (it seemed an hour) Mr. Atwater withdrew from an earnestly whispered conference and stood up to address the audience again. Mr. Temple took a seat in the row of chairs facing

the audience. He seemed purposely to choose a seat beside Ira who sat, one knee over the other, bending forward with his arms about his knee. The hunched attitude was familiar to Westy and took him back to the kitchen porch at the farm where he had listened to Ira's dubious reminiscences. Mr. Temple spoke genially to him from time to time, and once laughed audibly at something Ira said. It might possibly have been the kidnapping episode.

"Westy Martin," said Mr. Atwater, "stand up."

Westy stood, all bewildered. He was so close to the stage that one nervous hand rested upon the molding which bordered it. A curious contrast he seemed to the boy standing in the darkness of the hall some distance back. But Ira Hasbrook caught his eye and winked a kind of lowering wink at him, and Westy smiled back.

"You heard what this man said, Martin; is it true?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"All true?"

"Y-yes—yes, it is."

"Well, then, my young friend, it becomes my privilege to inform you that you have won the award of the Rotary Club of Bridgeboro of a trip to the

Yellowstone National Park (great applause) next summer. Your troop is congratulated (process of gagging Pee-wee) and you have the unstinted and unanimous commendation of this committee for your generous and self-sacrificing act. (Applause.) Your friend Mr. Hasbrook wishes me to say how fortunate it was that you had your rifle with you and were not afraid to use it.

"You will be glad to know that Mr. John Temple (who delights in taking glory away from other people) has made a proposition which somewhat amplifies the Club's award. Indeed it puts our poor Club somewhat in the shadow. He says that three is his lucky number. (Laughter.) And he, therefore, proposes that a scout in your troop of whose exploit honorable mention was to have been made, Warde Hollister, accompany you to the Yellowstone at his expense.

"The scout to whom the honor was to have been awarded, Edwin Carlisle of Westboro, receives also honorable mention for his exploit in putting out a forest fire. He too is to be a recipient of Mr. Temple's munificence and is likewise awarded the honor of accompanying you.

"You, Martin, go as the Rotary Club's winning

candidate. Carlisle and Hollister go with you as the two winners of special mention for their exploits and are sent by Mr. Temple. I have suggested to him that you be called the Temple Trio, but he insists that the name of the Rotary Club shall be used. Your friend Mr. Hasbrook suggests that since probably none of you know how to shoot, you be called the Bungling Bunch." (Great laughter suddenly increased to uproar by the thunderous voice of Scout Harris.)

"It's just like I said it would be, only more so!" he shouted. "It's—it's—it's—it's like two helpings of dessert! We're going to have two of them in our troop! That shows even when I'm mistaken I'm right!"

And amid the tumult of cheers and laughter, Edwin Carlisle, scout of Westboro, stood smiling, silent, obedient, till Mr. Atwater called to him that he might sit down.

So it happened that Westy Martin not only went to the Yellowstone, but went in company of two companions the following summer. It was natural that in the long interval of waiting these three scouts should strike up a sort of special comradeship, and by spring they were inseparable.

At last the big day came, and they were speeding westward in a comfortable Pullman car, beguiling the tedious hours of travel by matching their wits against a rather amusing stranger, a traveling man, whose acquaintance they had made on the train.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WESTWARD HO

"GRIZZLIES? Oh, hundreds of them! But they're away back up in the mountains; you won't see them."

"They're about the fiercest animals there, aren't they?" one of the boys asked.

"Well," drawled the traveling man, working his cigar over to the corner of his mouth and contemplating the boys in the shrewd way he had. "I don't know about that. The wallerpagoes are pretty runctious. But they don't bother you unless you bother them. Now you take a skehinkum, one of the big kind——"

"You mean the kind with the whitish black fur?" Warde Hollister laughed.

The traveling man worked his cigar over to the opposite corner of his mouth and looked at Warde with an expression of humorous skepticism. "Don't you learn about them in the boy scouts?" he asked.

"Oh, positively," said Warde. "They're all right as long as you don't feed them on gum-drops."

The traveling man was having the time of his life with the three boys. They called him the traveling man because they thought he looked and talked like one. They had ventured to ask him his business and he had told them that it was starting revolutions in South America. He had even hinted that he was in a plot to blow up the Panama Canal, and had asked them not to mention this to their parents. He had said that if they kept his secret he might later let them in on a scheme to restore North America to its rightful owners, the Indians. "Wrap it up and we'll take it and deliver it to them," Warde Hollister had said.

Throughout the long journey they had wondered and speculated as to what and who this amusing stranger really was. And they had decided in conference that he was a traveling salesman. He seemed to have a hearty contempt for the boasted prowess of boy scouts, but the three boys did not dislike him for that. In the pleasant art of jolly-ing they had been able to hold their own. And he seemed to like them for that. But he would not take them seriously.

They had told him about tracking and signaling and outdoor resourcefulness and woods lore and he had been pleased to poke fun at them about their skill and knowledge. He had appeared to derive much entertainment from this pastime. Pee-wee Harris (Raven and mascot) would have been able to "handle" him, but unfortunately Pee-wee was not on this trip. So the responsibility for defending the dignity of scouting fell to Warde Hollister, Edwin Carlisle and Westy Martin.

"And bandits?" Westy asked.

"Bandits? Oceans of them! They spurt right up out of the geysers," said the stranger.

"What could be sweeter?" said Eddie Carlisle.

"Can't you answer a civil question?" Westy asked, the least bit testily.

"Things have to be civil to suit you, hey?" the traveling man said. "Anything uncivilized and——"

"We're asking you if it's true that there are train robbers and men like that in the park?" Westy said.

"Sure there are," said the stranger. "Where do you suppose they buy their post cards to send home?"

The three boys seemed on the point of giving him up as a hopeless case.

"Why? Do you want to go hunting them?" the stranger asked.

"We wouldn't be the first boy scouts to help the authorities," Warde said.

This seemed to amuse the traveling man greatly. He contemplated the three of them with a kind of good-humored, sneering skepticism. Then he was moved to be serious.

"Well, I'll tell you how it is," he said. "The Yellowstone Park is really two places; see? There's the wild Yellowstone and the tame Yellowstone. The park is full of grizzlies and rough characters of the wild and fuzzy west but they don't patronize the sightseeing autos. They're kind of modest and diffident and they stay back in the mountains where you won't see them. You know train robbers as a rule are sort of bashful.

"You kids are just going to see the park and you'll have your hands full, too. You'll sit in a nice comfortable automobile and the man will tell you what to look at and you'll see geysers and things and canyons and a lot of odds and ends

and you'll have the time of your lives. There's a picture shop between Norris and the Canyon; you drop in there and see if you can get a post card showing Pelican Cone. That'll give you an idea of where *I'll* be. You can think of me up in the wilderness while you're listening to the concert in the Old Faithful Inn. That's where they have the big geyser in the back yard—sprurts once an hour, Johnny on the spot. I suppose," added the stranger with that shrewd, skeptical look which was beginning to tell on the boys, "that if you kids really saw a grizzly you wouldn't stop running till you hit New York. I think you said scouts know how to run.

"We wouldn't stop there," said the Carlisle boy; "we'd be so scared that we'd just take a running jump across the Atlantic Ocean and land in Europe."

"What would you really do now if you met a bandit?" the stranger asked. "*Shoot him dead* I suppose, like Deadwood Dick in the dime novels."

"We don't read dime novels," said Westy.

"But just the same," said Warde, "it might be the worse for that bandit. Didn't you read——"

The traveling man laughed outright.

"All right, you can laugh," said Westy, a trifle annoyed.

The stranger stuck his feet up between Warde and Westy, who sat in the seat facing and put his arm on the farther shoulder of Eddie Carlisle who sat beside him. Then he worked his unlighted cigar across his mouth and tilted it at an angle which somehow seemed to bespeak a good-natured contempt of the boy scouts.

"Just between ourselves," said he, "who takes care of the publicity stuff for the boy scouts anyway? Who puts all this stuff in the newspapers about boy scouts finding lost people and saving lives and putting out forest fires and plugging up holes in dams and saving towns from floods and all that sort of thing? I read about one kid who found a German wireless station during the war——"

"That was true," snapped Warde, stung into some show of real anger by this flippant slander. "I suppose you don't know that a scout out west in Illinois——"

"You mean out *east* in Illinois," laughed the stranger. "You're in the wild and woolly west and you don't even know it. I suppose if you were

dropped from the train right now you'd start west for Chicago."

The three boys laughed for it did seem funny to think of Illinois being far east of them. They felt a bit chagrined too at the realization that, after all, their view of the rugged wonders they were approaching was to be enjoyed from the rather prosaic vantage point of a sightseeing auto. What would Buffalo Bill or Kit Carson have said to that?

The traveling man looked out of the window and said, "We'll hit Emigrant pretty soon if it's still there. The cyclones out here blow the villages around so half the time the engineer don't know where to look for them. I remember Barker's Corners used to be right behind a big tree in Montana and it got blown away and they found it two years afterward in Arizona."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE STRANGER

EMIGRANT. The last stop on the long, long journey from New York. The last stop till the thundering train would reach the Gardiner entrance of the Yellowstone National Park. They were within thirty miles of that wonderland.

Westy was glad that there was one more station to be reached before his dream should be a reality. His nerves were so much on edge that the one, poor, little station of Emigrant would act as a sort of valve to relieve him of the tension that he felt. He was glad that they weren't going to reach their destination quite yet—he was too excited. Yes, he was glad there was just one more station. Then, *then*——

As for the traveling man, he seemed to be about as excited and anticipatory as if he were strolling across the street to buy another cigar.

The train thundered along through the rugged Montana country, its screeching whistle now and again echoing from the towering mountains. On, on, on it rushed with a kind of disdainful preoccupation, going straight about its business, circling the frowning heights, crossing torrents, unhindered, invincible. Did anybody live or even venture in those wild mountains, Westy wondered. Were there trails there? Could it be that grizzly bears heard in their fastnesses the shriek of that steel monster that was rushing straight to its end?

Only this roaring, swerving, thundering, rushing train stood between Westy Martin and those uninhabited wilds. No smudge signal would save him there. No approved device for helping the lost pilgrim in distress would serve him in that endless, rugged wilderness. The leather seat of the smoking car seemed good to him.

"Who's going to look after you kids?" their traveling acquaintance asked.

The boys, particularly Warde, did not like to hear it put that way but he answered, "The auto is going to meet us at Gardiner; there's a scout official who's going to be there and they'll call our names out. They're going to take us to the hotel

at Mammoth Hot Springs. After that we go on a kind of a tour. It's all planned out for us."

"Well, I'll be with you as far as the Springs," said the stranger, "so if you don't make connections all right I'll get things fixed up for you. How the dickens did you three kids happen to beat it out here anyway?"

"If we told you, you'd only laugh," said Ed Carlisle. "We did some stunts, that's how. We——"

"Don't you tell him unless he tells *us* what *he's* doing out here," Warde said.

"All right, that's a go," laughed the stranger.

"I bet you're just selling things to tourists," said Westy. "I bet you're bringing a lot of souvenirs of Yellowstone Park from New York to sell out here."

"Yes, and how about you?" the stranger asked.

"We're sent by the Rotary Club," said Warde, "because we did three things to win the award."

The traveling man cocked his head sideways and listened in a humorously skeptical way which was very annoying. "You found somebody who was lost in the woods?" he queried.

"No, we didn't find somebody who was lost in the woods," Warde said somewhat testily.

"No? Well then they sent you because you're the only three boy scouts that haven't done that. I congratulate you, here's my hand."

"This fellow, Westy Martin," said Warde, "killed a deer that somebody else had shot because he wanted to put it out of its suffering and he let people think he was the one that shot it; he did that so they wouldn't punish the other person. But it was found out so they gave him the good turn award. This other fellow put out a forest fire and I took a long hike and got a job for somebody. So now what are you doing out here? You didn't even tell us your name."

"Well, that's very nice," said their acquaintance; "my name is Madison C. Wilde and I'm mixed up with the Educational Films——"

"You're in the movies?" shouted Ed.

"Just at present," said Mr. Madison C. Wilde. "I'm in the business of getting snap-shots of wild animals to show you fellows when you happen to have thirty cents to buy a ticket. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"I'd like to know if you're really going up on that mountain, Pelican Cove, like you said," Westy asked.

"What do you suppose I've been hanging around Washington, D. C. for the last two weeks for?" Mr. Wilde asked. "I'd rather stalk grizzlies on Pelican Cone than stalk National Park Directors in Washington. I'd rather go after pictures than permits, I can tell you that if anybody should ask you. Grizzlies are bad enough, but park directors"—he shook his head in despair—"that bunch in Washington," and shook his head again.

The boys stared at him. In their minds the pursuit of wild animals, for whatever purpose, was associated with buckskin and cartridge-laden belts. Yet here was a little man with a bristly mustache whose only weapon was an unlighted cigar innocently pointing toward heaven. They had already imbibed enough of the atmosphere of the legendary west to be somewhat shocked at the thought of this brisk, little man, with all the prosaic atmosphere of the city about him, going into the wilds to stalk grizzlies. He did not seem at all like Buffalo Bill.

"Gee whiz!" ejaculated Westy. "I thought you were a salesman or something like that."

Mr. Madison C. Wilde gave him a whimsical look and proceeded to draw forth from an inside pocket a mammoth wallet while the three boys

stared speechless. Could this man be just fooling them? The wallet was formidable enough to stagger any grizzly. It was bulging with money, which to the boys seemed to confirm the stranger's connection with the movies, where fabulous sums are possessed and handed about. Mr. Wilde was as deliberate with his wallet as any hunter of the woolly west could possibly have been with his gun. He screwed his cigar over to the end of his mouth, tilted it to an almost vertical position, then closing one eye he explored the caves and fastnesses of his wallet with the other.

His quest eventually resulted in the capture of a paper which he brought forth out of a veritable jungle of bills and documents. "Here we are," said he, tenderly unfolding the document.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AN IMPORTANT PAPER

"WITH the exception of the Declaration of Independence," said Mr. Wilde, "this is the most valuable paper in the world."

He handed it to Westy and the three boys, reading it together, saw that it was a permit issued by the director of the National Park Service at Washington to Mr. Alexander Creston, President of the Educational Film Company of New York to "dispatch employees of said Educational Film Company into such remote sections of the Yellowstone National Park as should be designated by the local park authorities for the purpose of securing photographs of the wild life, the use of traps and firearms being strictly prohibited. This permit expires——" And so forth and so forth. It concluded with the signature of the director of the National Park Service.

"Gee williger!" said Westy.

"Talking about stalking!" said Ed.

"No wonder you laugh at us," said Warde.

"Did you ever try stalking officials in Washington?" Mr. Wilde asked.

"We never stalked anything but robins and—and turtles and things like that," said Warde with a note of self-disgust in his voice.

"Never hit the red tape trail, hey? Well I guess turtles are pretty near as slow as Washington officials. I've been just exactly three weeks in Washington stalking this permit. Pretty good specimen, hey? That's more valuable than any grizzly, that is." He gazed at it with a look of whimsical affection and tucked it safely away in his wallet.

"It makes us feel kind of silly," said Westy, "to think of the kind of things you're going to do. I guess it's no wonder you make fun of us."

"Well, I'll tell you," said Mr. Wilde not unkindly and with some approach to seriousness in his voice and manner, "you scout kids are all right. You get lots of fresh air and exercise and they're the best things for you. You go stalking June-bugs and caterpillars and it keeps you out of mischief. It's just the difference between the amateur and the professional. Now you kids go in for

these things as a pastime and that's all right. You're having the time of your lives. I'm for the boy scouts first, last and always. Stalking, tracking, etc., you make games out of all those things, and they're bully good games too. You're a pretty wide-awake bunch. But you'll never do these things in a serious way because you don't *have to*. Get me?"

"We don't get a chance," said Westy.

"Now you take a kid born out in the wilds—like this kid I've got waiting for me—Stove Polish or whatever his name is; he's an Indian."

"Who?" said Westy.

"What?" said Warde.

"*Stove Polish?*" gasped Ed.

"Shining Sun his name is," said Mr. Wilde. "Sounds like some kind of stove polish so I call him Stove Polish——"

"Where is he?" Westy asked, all excitement.

"He's waiting out at the Mammoth Hotel at Hot Springs with Mr. Creston; you'll see him. He's going up in the mountains with Clip and me. Now that kid is what you'd call a scout, the little rascal. He had to be a scout or starve. He didn't read his little book and raise up his hand and say

he was going to be a scout. He just got to be a scout because he had to.

"When you're in the Rocky Mountains a couple of hundred miles from the nearest town and the nearest town consists of one house, why, it's a case of you or the Rocky Mountains—which wins. See? If you stay lost you starve. If you don't know the signs you're out of luck. If you don't know what herbs to eat you don't get any dinner. If you can't tell where to look for a cave by the looks of the land, why then, you stay out in the rain and snow. See? If you haven't got a gun the only way you can catch a bird is to fool him. So he knows how to fool them. You fellows are scouts because you want to have a lot of fun. But Stove Polish is a scout because he wants to live; he has to be one, or he did have to up to a year or two ago. He knows how to run without making a sound because if he made a sound it would be all up with him."

"You said it," enthused Warde.

"Why, a couple of years or more ago," continued Mr. Wilde, "when that little rascal escaped from the Cheyenne reservation right back here a few miles, he got into the mountains and nobody heard

a word from him for a year and a half—never even sent a post card saying he was having a nice time or anything. Beaver Pete found him up in the mountains and brought him down to Yellowstone and Mr. Creston snapped him up like a used Cadillac. Well now, that kid is a full-blooded Cheyenne Indian; he's a grandson of old Stick-in-the-mud who was in the Custer scrap. You've heard of that old geezer, haven't you?

"Well, sir, that kid could call like a hawk and bring the hawk near enough so he could drop it with a stone—*absolutely*. Beaver Pete told me that when he found that kid in the trapping season he was wearing a bearskin from a bear he had caught and killed without so much as a bean-shooter. Nature couldn't freeze him or starve him. He could find water by instinct same as an animal does. You see, boys, what you *have* to do you can do. There is no such thing as scouting in the midst of civilization or in neighbor Smith's woods. Scouts are scouts because they *have* to be scouts; it isn't an outdoor sport. A scout is a fellow who has fought *because he had to fight* with nature and has won out. Scouts are silent people as a rule, I've met some of them. They're taciturn and si-

lent. The boy scouts are the noisiest bunch I ever met in my life."

The door at the end of the car opened and the voice of a trainman put an end to Mr. Wilde's talk.

"Emigrant. The next stop is Emigrant."

CHAPTER XXXVII

PARLOR SCOUTS

THE three winners of the Rotary Club award were not altogether cheered by the talk of their traveling acquaintance. They felt a trifle ashamed and dissatisfied with themselves. Here was a brisk, resourceful, adventurous man whose vocation seemed a very dream of romance. And he looked upon them as nice boys playing an interesting game. He did not take them seriously.

He regarded Shining Sun (or Stove Polish as he preferred to call him) as a rare discovery—a real, all around, dyed-in-the-wool, little scout, a scout whose skill and lore could be used in adventurous undertakings. Amateurs! Nice boys! And they were about to have their reward of merit for three exploits, the recital of which had not exactly staggered Mr. Wilde. They were going to drive around Yellowstone Park in autos and stop at the

hotels and visit modern, well-equipped camps, and see the petrified forests and the geysers.

And meanwhile an Indian boy was going into the unfrequented depths of the vast park to do for white men what they could not do for themselves. Descendent of savages though he was, and with the primitive vein persisting in him, they took him seriously, these men; he was a real little scout. Not a boy scout.

These were the thoughts, the reflections, of Westy Martin as he arose saying in a rather disheartened tone, "Come on, let's go out on the platform and watch the scenery."

The three boys staggered through the aisle of the car holding to the seat backs as the rushing train swerved in its winding course among the mountains. They had been but visitors in the smoking car and now in the one next it they came to their own seats, which at night had been transformed into berths.

On one of the seats lay a duffel bag containing the few camping utensils which they had brought against the unlikely prospect of a night's bivouac in the open. Westy was glad that they had not exposed these up-to-date devices to their acquaintance

in the next car. He might have commented flip-pantly on the collapsible or the folding frying pan. In a previous encounter with that Philistine of the smoking car he had inquired about the meaning of Westy's treasured pathfinder's badge, and had said that when he was a boy he had often played hares and hounds and hide-and-seek.

"Come on out in back," said Warde.

They staggered on through the train holding the backs of seats to steady their progress. All the passengers seemed weary, the cars littered and hot and stuffy. Discarded newspapers and magazines lay on the seats and floor. The passengers sprawled lazily in postures far from elegant. Only the train seemed wide-awake and bent upon some definite purpose. It roared and rattled and whistled and now and again a faint answering whistle was heard from the distant mountains as if the ghost of some locomotive long dead were concealed there.

In one of the cars a litter of sticky bits of tissue paper filled the aisle in company of an empty box which had contained somebody or other's fresh lemon-drops. Westy was not the scout to pass by such a litter, he had cleared up the luncheon rub-

bish after too many motoring parties for that. But he did not stoop to this worthy task of the scout now. He was not in the mood to be a menial, a housemaid scout; not with the exploits of Shining Sun so fresh in his mind. He was thoroughly dissatisfied with himself and he passed the litter by in proud disdain of it.

"Don't you be a lemon-drop scout," he said sneeringly to Warde, who was just behind him.

"How did you know I was going to stoop?" Warde asked.

Ah, that was the question. It was because Westy Martin was a better scout than he knew and like the true woodsman had eyes in the back of his head.

"I'm kind of sorry we didn't ask him if he'd let us go up in the forest with him," Warde said.

"A tall chance," said Westy disconsolately.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SOMETHING "REAL"

AND so these three parlor scouts, winners of the Rotary Club award, reached the rear platform of the last car and gazed upon the landscape as it receded before their eyes. The whimsical Mr. Wilde had put them in bad sorts and the great, vast, stupendous west seemed to confirm all that their chance acquaintance had said.

How hopeless the lot of the lost wanderer here, how useless the good scout handbook, how futile all the pleasantly primitive devices to find one's way home—when home is just around the corner. They were just boys playing at scouting, nice boys, boy scouts. Well, at all events, it had won them this trip to the Yellowstone where there would be much to see. . . .

There was certainly not much to see at Emigrant. If there had ever been an Emigrant there it must have emigrated away, or been blown away as Mr. Wilde had said of other western stopping places.

Certainly there was no sign of life there. Yet evidently the place was useful to the railroad for the train stopped there, a visitation of life and energy in a scene of desolation.

Not a living soul was there to welcome them. Even the companionable noise of the train had ceased or died down to a slow pulsating sound of the locomotive. It seemed an impatient sound as if the steel brute were anxious to be on its way again. How lonesome, even forbidding the landscape looked from the cozy, little refuge where they viewed it. Only this little platform between them and the vast unknown.

Westy was a sensible, thoughtful boy and the bigness of the country impressed him. It affected his mood. What Mr. Wilde had said would probably not have been taken too seriously if Westy had been in the east. It was not Mr. Wilde alone, but the whole environment as well, which made all that Westy was and had accomplished paltry by comparison. It all seemed to belittle his scouting and make it infantile and ridiculous. Everything seemed to impart piquancy to Mr. Wilde's home truths. Here indeed was the land where men had fought with untamed Nature and won out.

It seemed to Westy that he had been swimming with a life preserver. He sat down on the car platform and rested his chin on his hands and gazed about. It was not a propitious mood for a boy to be in who was about to be shown the wonders of the Yellowstone National Park. He almost wished that he had not met that disturbing person, Mr. Wilde. He could not get Shining Sun out of his mind. To do anything on a *little* scale seemed contemptible to Westy. Was scouting after all a toy?

His two companions caught his mood though they were not as impressionable as he. They sat down on the platform beside him and the three made a rather disconsolate trio, considering that they were within a score or so of miles of their hearts' desire.

"I remind myself of Pee-wee, tracking a hop-toad," mused Westy.

Ed Carlisle took him up, "Just because Mr. Wilde says this and that——"

"Suppose he had gone to Scout Headquarters in New York for a scout to help them in the mountains," said Westy. "Would he have found one? When it comes to dead serious business——"

"Look what Roosevelt said about scouts," said Warde. "He said they were a lot of help and that scouting was a great thing, that's what he said."

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Wilde that?" Ed asked.

"Because I didn't think of it," said Warde.

"Just because I get the Astronomy badge that doesn't prove I'm an astronomer," said Ed.

"Nobody says a scout's a doctor because he has the first aid badge," encouraged Warde.

Westy only looked straight ahead of him, his abstracted gaze fixed upon the wild, lonesome mountains. A great bird was soaring over them and he watched it till it became a mere speck. And meanwhile, the locomotive steamed at steady intervals like an impatient beast. Then, suddenly, its voice changed, there was strain and effort in its steaming.

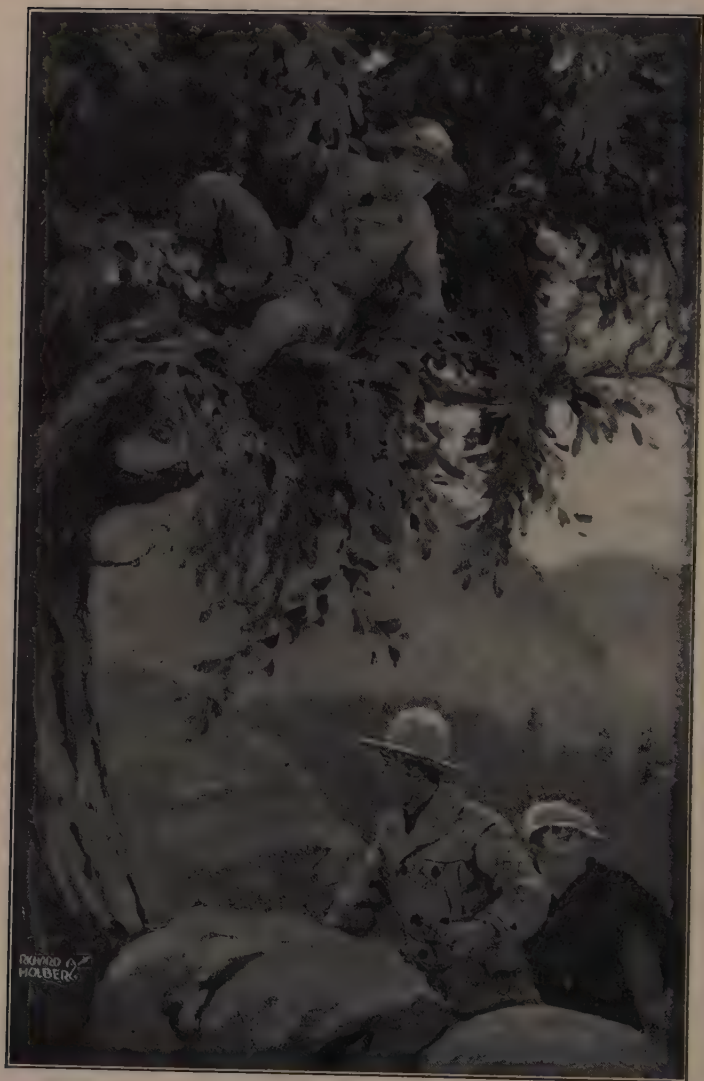
"Guess we're going to go," said Warde. "Now for the little old Yellowstone, hey, Westy? Wake up, come out of that, you old grouch. Don't you know a scout is supposed to smile and look pleasant? We should worry about Mr. Madison C. Wilde."

"If we never did anything *real* and *big* it's because there weren't any of those things to do," said

Warde. "Didn't he say what you *have* to do, you do? That's just what he said."

Westy did not answer, only arose in a rather disgruntled way and stepped off the platform. He strolled forward alone along the outside of the car, kicking a stone as he went and watching it intently. When he raised his eyes he had almost reached the other end of the car. The car stood on a siding quite alone; the train was rushing away among the mountains.

THE END



WESTY MOVED NOT A MUSCLE, SCARCELY BREATHED.
Westy Martin in the Yellowstone.

WESTY MARTIN IN THE YELLOWSTONE

BY
PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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WESTY MARTIN IN THE YELLOWSTONE

CHAPTER I

MR. WILDE AND THE THREE SCOUTS

WHEN Westy Martin and his two companions, Warde Hollister and Ed Carlyle, were on their long journey to the Yellowstone National Park, they derived much amusement from talking with a man whose acquaintance they made on the train.

This entertaining and rather puzzling stranger caused the boys much perplexity and they tried among themselves to determine what business he was engaged in.

For a while they did not even know his name. Then they learned it was Madison C. Wilde. And because he kept a cigar tilted up in the extreme corner of his mouth and showed a propensity for "jollyng" them they decided (and it was a likely sort of guess) that he was a traveling salesman.

2 WESTY IN THE YELLOWSTONE

Mr. Wilde had the time of his life laughing at the good scouts, and, moreover, he humorously belittled scouting, seeming to see it as a sort of pretty game for boys, like marbles or hide-and-seek.

He had his little laugh, and then afterward the three boys had their little laugh. And he who laughs last is said to have somewhat the advantage in laughing.

Mr. Wilde told the three scouts that Yellowstone Park was full of grizzlies. "Oh, hundreds of them," he said. "But they're not as savage as the wallerpagoes. The skehinkums are pretty wild too," he added.

"Is that so?" laughed Westy.

"You didn't happen to see any killy loo birds while you were there, did you?"

Mr. Madison C. Wilde worked his cigar over to the corner of his mouth, contemplating the boys with an expression of cynical good humor. "Do they let you use popguns in the Boy Scouts?" he asked. "Because it isn't safe to go in the woods without a popgun."

"Oh, yes," said Warde Hollister, "and we carry cap pistols too to be on the safe side. Scouts are supposed to be prepared, you know."

"Some warriors," laughed Mr. Wilde. "You'll see the real thing out here, you kids," he added seriously. "No running around and getting lost in back yards. If you get lost out here you'll come pretty near knowing you're lost."

"What could be sweeter?" Ed Carlyle asked.

The foregoing is a fair sample of the kind of banter that had passed back and forth between Mr. Wilde and the boys ever since they had struck up an acquaintance. They had told him all about scouting, tracking, signaling and such things, and he had derived much idle entertainment in poking fun at them about their flaunted skill and resourcefulness.

"I'd like to see some boy scouts up against the real thing," he said. "I'd like to see you get really lost in the mountains out west here. You'd all starve to death, that's what would happen to you—unless you could eat that wonderful handbook manual, or whatever you call it, that you get your stunts out of."

"We eat everything," said Westy.

"Yes?" laughed Mr. Wilde. "Well, I'm pretty good at eating myself, but there's one thing I can't swallow and that's the stories I hear about scouts

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saving drowning people and finding kidnaped children and all that kind of stuff. You kids seem to have the newspapers hypnotized. I read about a kid that put out a forest fire and saved a lot of lives at the risk of his own life. How much do you suppose the scout people pay to get that kind of stuff into the papers?"

"Oh, vast sums," said Warde.

Mr. Wilde contemplated the three of them where they sat crowded on the Pullman seat opposite him. There was great amusement twinkling in his eyes, but approval too. He did not take them too seriously as scouts, *real scouts*, but just the same he liked them immensely.

"I bet you've been to the Yellowstone a lot of times," said Ed Carlyle.

"Oh, a few," said Mr. Wilde. "I've been up in woods off the trails where little boys don't go—without their nurse girls."

"I've heard there are bandits in the park," said Westy.

"Millions of them," said Mr. Wilde. "But don't be afraid, they don't hang out at the hotels where you'll be."

"Is it true there are train robbers out this way?" Westy asked.

"Getting scared? Why, I thought boy scouts could handle train robbers."

"We can't even handle you," Warde said.

CHAPTER II

MR. WILDE HOLDS FORTH

INDEED the three boys seemed on the point of giving Mr. Wilde up for a hopeless case.

"Why? Do you want to go hunting train robbers?" the exasperating stranger asked.

"Well," said Westy, rather disgusted, "we wouldn't be the first boy scouts to help the authorities. Some boy scouts in Philadelphia helped catch a highway robber."

This seemed greatly to amuse Mr. Wilde. He screwed his cigar over from one corner of his mouth to the other and looked at the boys good-naturedly, but seriously.

"Well, I'll tell you just how it is," he said. "There are really two Yellowstone Parks. There's the Yellowstone Park where you go, and there's the Yellowstone Park where I go. There's the tame Yellowstone Park and the wild Yellowstone Park.

"The park is full of grizzlies and rough char-

acters of the wild and fuzzy West, but they don't patronize the sightseeing autos. They're kind of modest and diffident and they stay back in the mountains where you won't see them. You know train robbers as a rule are sort of bashful. You kids are just going to see the park, and you'll have your hands full, too. You'll sit in a nice comfortable automobile and the man will tell you what to look at and you'll see geysers and things and canyons and a lot of odds and ends and you'll have the time of your lives. There's a picture shop between Norris and the Canyon; you drop in there and see if you can get a post card showing Pelican Cone. That'll give you an idea of where I'll be. You can think of me up in the wilderness while you're listening to the concert in the Old Faithful Inn. That's where they have the big geezer in the back yard—spurts once an hour, Johnny on the spot. I suppose," he added with that shrewd, skeptical look which was beginning to tell on the boys, "that if you kids really saw a grizzly you wouldn't stop running till you hit New York. I think you said scouts know how to run."

"We wouldn't stop there," said the Carlyle boy.
"We'd be so scared that we'd just take a running

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jump across the Atlantic Ocean and land in Europe."

"What would you really do now if you met a bandit?" Mr. Wilde asked. "*Shoot him dead*, I suppose, like Deadwood Dick in the dime novels."

"We don't read dime novels," said Westy.

"But just the same," said Warde, "it might be the worse for that bandit. Didn't you read——"

Mr. Wilde laughed heartily.

"All right, you can laugh," said Westy, a trifle annoyed.

Mr. Wilde stuck his feet up between Warde and Westy, who sat in the seat facing him, and put his arm on the farther shoulder of Eddie Carlyle, who sat beside him. Then he worked the unlighted cigar across his mouth and tilted it at an angle which somehow seemed to bespeak a good-natured contempt of Boy Scouts.

"Just between ourselves," said he, "who takes care of the publicity stuff for the Boy Scouts anyway? I read about one kid who found a German wireless station during the war——"

"That was true," snapped Warde, stung into some show of real anger by this flippant slander.

"I suppose you don't know that a scout out west in Illinois——"

"You mean out *east* in Illinois," laughed Mr. Wilde. "You're in the wild and woolly West and you don't even know it. I suppose if you were dropped from the train right now you'd start west for Chicago."

The three boys laughed, for it did seem funny to think of Illinois being far east of them. They felt a bit chagrined too at the realization that after all their view of the rugged wonders they were approaching was to be enjoyed from the rather prosaic vantage point of a sightseeing auto. What would Buffalo Bill or Kit Carson have said to that?

Mr. Wilde looked out of the window and said, "We'll hit Emigrant pretty soon if it's still there. The cyclones out here blow the villages around so half the time the engineer don't know where to look for them. I remember Barker's Corners used to be right behind a big tree in Montana and it got blown away and they found it two years afterward in Arizona."

CHAPTER III

THE KNOCKOUT BLOW

It is said that constant dripping wears away a stone. At first the boys held their own good-humoredly against Mr. Wilde's banter. He seemed to be only poking fun at them and they took his talk in the spirit in which it was meant. He seemed to think they were a pretty nice sort of boys, but he did not take scouting very seriously.

Now Westy was a sensitive boy and these continual allusions to the childish character of boy scouting got on his nerves. Then suddenly came the big shock, and this proved a knockout blow for poor Westy.

It developed in the course of conversation that Mr. Madison C. Wilde was engaged in a most thrilling kind of business. In the most casual sort of way he informed these boys that he was connected with the movies. Not only that, but his business connected itself with nothing less than the interest-

ing work of photographing wild animals in their natural haunts for representation upon the screen. He was none other than the adventurous field manager of EDUCATIONAL FILMS, at which these very boys had many times gazed with rapt interest.

Nor was this all. Mr. Wilde (heartless creature that he was) casually brought forth from the depths of a pocket a mammoth wallet containing such a sum of money as is only known in the movies and, affectionately unfolding a certain paper, exhibited it to the spellbound gaze of his three young traveling acquaintances. This document was nothing less than a permit from the Commissioner of National Parks at Washington authorizing Mr. Wilde to visit the remotest sections of the great park, to stalk wild life on a truly grand scale, on a scale unknown to Boy Scouts who track rabbits and chipmunks in Boy Scout camps!

But here was the knockout blow for poor Westy. Mr. Wilde explained that waiting for him at the hotel near the Gardiner entrance of the park was a *real scout* whose services as guide and stalker had been arranged for with some difficulty. This romantic and happy creature was an Indian boy known in the Far West as *Shining Sun*. He was

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not, as Mr. Wilde explained, a back-yard scout. He was the genuine article. And he was going to lead Mr. Wilde and his associates into the dim, unpeopled wilderness.

And while Shining Sun, the Indian boy, was engaged in this delightfully adventurous task, Westy Martin and his two companions would be riding around on the main traveled roads on a sightseeing auto!

Was it any wonder that Westy was disgusted? Was it any wonder that in face of these startling revelations he began to see himself as just a nice sort of boy from Bridgeboro, New Jersey? A back-yard scout?

Truly, indeed, there were two Yellowstone Parks! Truly, indeed, thought poor Westy, there were two kinds of scouts.

And he, alas, was the other kind.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHANCE COMES

THEN it was that Westy Martin, thoroughly disgusted with fate and thoroughly dissatisfied with himself and boy scouting generally, arose, just as the trainman called out: "*Emigrant! Emigrant is the next stop!*" And Westy Martin, leading the way, went headlong into the adventurous field of "big scouting"—never knowing it.

The three of them sat down disconsolately on one of the steps of the rear platform of the last car while the train paused at Emigrant, a deserted hamlet almost small enough to put in one's pocket. Warde and Ed had followed Westy through the several cars, not fully sharing his mood, but obedient to him as leader. They made a doleful little trio, these fine boys who had been given a trip to the Yellowstone Park by the Rotary Club of America in recognition of a heroic good turn which each had done. Alas, that this glib stranger, Mr.

Wilde, and that other unknown hero, Shining Sun, the Indian boy, should have destroyed, as it were with one fell blow, their wholesome enjoyment of scouting and their happy anticipations. Poor Westy.

I must relate for you the conversation of these three as they sat in disgruntled retirement on the rear platform of the last car nursing their envy of Shining Sun.

"I remind myself of Pee-wee Harris tracking a hop-toad," grouched Westy.

"Just the same we've had a lot of fun since we've been in the scouts," said Warde. "If we hadn't been scouts we wouldn't be here."

"We'll be looking at geysers and hot springs and things while *they're* tracking grizzlies," said Westy. "We're boy scouts all right! Gee whiz, I'd like to do something *big*."

"Just because Mr. Wilde says this and that—" Ed Carlyle began.

"Suppose he had gone to Scout headquarters in New York for a scout to help him in the mountains," said Westy. "Would he have found one? When it comes to dead serious business——"

"Look what Roosevelt said about Boy Scouts,"

cheered Warde. "He said they were a lot of help and that scouting is a peach of a thing, that's just what he said."

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Wilde that?" Ed asked.

"Because I didn't think of it," said Warde.

"Just because I got the tracking badge that doesn't mean I'm a professional scout like Buffalo Bill," said Ed. "We've had plenty of fun and we're going to see the sights out in Yellowstone."

"While *they're* scouting—doing something big," groused Westy.

"We should worry about them," said Ed.

"Westy only looked straight ahead of him, his abstracted gaze fixed upon the wild, lonesome mountains. A great bird was soaring above them, and he watched it till it became a mere speck. And meanwhile the locomotive steamed at steady intervals like an impatient beast. Then, suddenly, its voice changed, there were strain and effort in its steaming.

"Guess we're going to go," said Warde, winking at Ed in silent comment on Westy's mood. "Now for the little old Yellowstone, hey, Westy, old scout?"

"Scout!" sneered Westy.

"Wake up, come out of that, you old grouch," laughed Ed. "Don't you know a scout is supposed to smile and look pleasant? Who cares about Stove Polish, or Shining Sun, or whatever his name is? I should bother my young life about Mr. Madison C. Wilde."

"If we never did anything *real* and *big* it's because there weren't any of those things for us to do," said Warde.

Westy did not answer, only arose in a rather disgruntled way and stepped off the platform. He strolled forward, as perhaps you who have followed his adventures will remember, till he reached the other end of the car. He was kicking a stone as he went. When he raised his eyes from the stone he saw that the car stood quite alone; it was on a siding, as he noticed now. The train, bearing that loquacious stranger, Mr. Madison C. Wilde, was rushing away among the mountains.

So, after all, Westy Martin had his wish (if that were really desirable) and was certainly face to face with something *real* and *big* and with a predicament rather chilling. He and his two companions, all three of them just nice boy scouts, were quite alone in the Rocky Mountains.

CHAPTER V

THE SHADOW OF MR. WILDE

WESTY's first supposition was that the coupling had given way, but an inspection of this by the three boys convinced them that the dropping of this last car had been intentional. They recalled now the significant fact that it had been empty save for themselves. It was a dilapidated old car and it seemed likely that it had been left there perhaps to be used as a temporary station. They had no other surmise.

One sobering reflection dominated their minds and that was that they had been left without baggage or provisions in a wild, apparently uninhabited country, thirty odd miles from the Gardiner entrance of Yellowstone Park.

As they looked about them there was no sign of human life or habitation anywhere, no hint of man's work save the steel rails which disappeared around a bend southward, and a rough road. Even as they looked, they could see in the distance little flickers of

smoke floating against a rock-ribbed mountainside.

Warde was the first to speak: "I don't believe this is Emigrant at all," he said. "I think the train just stopped to leave the car here; maybe they're going to make a station here. Anyway this is no village; it isn't even a station."

"Well, whatever it is, we're here," said Ed. "What are we going to do? That's a nice way to do, not lock the door of the car or anything."

"Maybe they'll back up," said Westy.

"They might," said Warde, "if they knew we were here, but who's going to tell the conductor?"

It seemed quite unlikely that the train would return. Even as they indulged this forlorn hope the distant flickers of smoke appeared farther and farther away against the background of the mountain. Then they could not be seen at all.

The three honor boys sat down on the lowest step of the old car platform and considered their predicament. One thing they knew, there was no other train that day. They had not a morsel of food, no camping equipment, no compass. For all that they could see they were in an uninhabited wilderness save for the savage life that lurked in the surrounding fastnesses.

"What are we going to do?" Warde asked, his voice ill concealing the concern he felt.

Ed Carlyle looked about scanning the vast panorama and shook his head.

"What would Shining Sun do?" Westy asked quietly. "All I know is we're going to Yellowstone Park. We know the railroad goes there, so we can't get lost. Thirty miles isn't so much to hike; we can do it in two days. I wouldn't get on a train now if one came along and stopped."

"Mr. Wilde has got you started," laughed Ed.

"That's what he has," said Westy, "and I'm going to keep going till I get to the park. I'm not going to face that man again and tell him I waited for somebody to come and get me."

"How about food?" Warde asked, not altogether captivated by Westy's proposal.

"What we have to get, we get," said Westy.

"Well, I think we'll get good and tired," said Ed.

"I'm sorry I haven't got a baby carriage to wheel you in," said Westy.

"Thanks," laughed Ed, "a scout is always thoughtful."

"He has to be more than thoughtful," said Westy.

"If it comes to that, if we had been thoughtful we

wouldn't have come into this car at all. It's all filled up with railroad junk and it wasn't intended for passengers."

"They should have locked the door or put a sign on it," said Warde.

"Well, anyway, here we are," Westy said.

"Absolutely," said Warde, who was always inclined to take a humorous view of Westy's susceptibility. "And I'll do anything you say. I'll tell you something right now that I didn't tell you before. Ed and I agreed that we'd do whatever you wanted to do on this trip; we said we'd follow you and let you be the leader. So now's our chance. We agreed that you did the big stunt and we voted that we'd just sort of let you lead. I don't know what Shining Sun would do, but that's what we agreed to do. So it's up to you, Westy, old boy. You're the boss and we'll even admit that we're not scouts if you say so. How about that, Ed?"

"That's me," said Ed.

"We're just dubs if you say so," Warde concluded.

The three sat in a row on the lowest step of the deserted car, and for a few moments no one spoke. Looking northward they could see the tracks in a

bee-line until the two rails seemed to come to a point in the direction whence the train had come. Far back in that direction, thirty miles or more, lay Livingston where they had breakfasted. There had been no stop between this spot and Livingston, though they had whizzed past an apparently deserted little way station named Pray.

Southward the tracks disappeared in their skirting course around a mountain. The road went in that direction too, but they could not follow it far with their eyes. It was a narrow, ill-kept dirt road and was certainly not a highway. The country was very still and lonesome. They had not realized this in the rushing, rattling train. But they realized it now as they sat, a forlorn little group, on the step and looked about them.

To Westy, always thoughtful and impressionable, the derisive spirit of Mr. Wilde made their predicament the more bearable. The spirit of that genial Philistine haunted him and made him grateful for the opportunity to do something "big." To reach the park without assistance would not, he thought, be so very big. It would be nothing in the eyes of Shining Sun. But at least it would be doing something. It would be more than playing hide-and-seek,

which Mr. Wilde seemed to think about the wildest adventure in the program of scouting. It would, at the least, be better than coming along a day late on another train, even supposing they could stop a train or reach the stopping place of one.

"It's just whatever you say, Westy, old boy," Warde said musingly, as he twirled his scout-knife into the soil again and again in a kind of solitaire mumbly peg. "Just—whatever—you—say. Maybe we're not——"

"You needn't say that again," said Westy; "we—you *are* scouts. You just proved it, so you might as well shut up because—but——"

"All right, we are then," said Warde. "You ought to know; gee whiz, it's blamed seldom I ever knew you to be mistaken. Now what's the big idea? Hey, Ed?"

"After you, my dear Sir Hollister," said Ed.

"Well, the first thing," said Westy, "is not to tell me you're not scouts."

"We'll do that little thing," said Warde.

"New conundrum," said Ed. "What is a scout?"

"You are," said Westy. "I wish I'd never met that Mr. Wilde."

"Forget it," said Warde.

"All right, now we know the first thing," said Ed. "How about the second? Where do we go from here?"

Westy glanced at him quickly and there was just the least suggestion of something glistening in his eyes. "Are you willing to hike it?" he asked.

"You tell 'em I am," said Ed Carlyle.

CHAPTER VI

STRANDED

"WELL, we know which direction to start in, and that's something," said Westy.

"And we're not hungry yet, and that's something else," said Warde. "We ought to be able to walk fifteen miles to-day and the rest of the way to-morrow. And if we can't find enough to eat in Montana to keep us from starving——"

"Then we ought to be ashamed to look Mr. Wilde in the face," said Westy.

"I wish I knew something about herbs and roots," said Ed. "The only kind of root that I know anything about is cube root and I don't like that; I'd rather starve. I wonder if they have sassafras roots out this way. I've got my return ticket pinned in my pocket with a safety-pin so we ought to be able to catch some fish."

"How about a line?" Warde asked.

"I can unravel some worsted from my sweater,"

said Ed. "I'm a regular bone-brick. I believe in the Lord more than anything. I'm not worrying. I know one thing. I'd like to go on in Paradise. I'd like to see the White and those fellows."

"Follow 'em," said Waddy.

"I'd like to see 'em—Follow 'em," said Ed.

"That's about as far back of taking on as he could get," said Waddy. "That's what you see. They take an Indian boy and make him a regular Indian. Because he can do the things that are supposed to be done in the tribe. You see him and I don't wonder you think there'd be some fellow in the same organization—"

"But I should think our very best boys ought to be some who could make out things like that. You know what he can do with arrows and Indian arrows. He's got that the way of it."

"That's right and we're wrong as he usually is," said Ed. "I believe in it. I'm not worrying about what he thinks. We have plenty of our own. What's worrying me is whether we should follow the tracks in the road. I believe in tracking and I'd say follow the tracks only because they go over high bridges and places where we couldn't walk. It's not so easy to track railroad tracks. But the

trouble with the road is we don't know where it goes."

"I don't believe it knows itself," said Warde, "by the looks of it."

"We want to go south; we know that," said Westy. "Gardiner is south from here."

"I thought we were on our way out west," said Warde. "I wish we had a compass, I know that."

"Do you suppose Shining Sun has a compass?" Westy asked.

"Now listen," said Ed. "I mean you, Westy. You've got the pathfinder's badge and the stalker's badge and a lot of others; you're a star scout. You should worry about Dutch Cleanser or Stove Polish or whatever his name is——"

"Shining Sun," said Westy.

"All right, when the shining sun comes up a little higher we'll find out which is north and south and east and west and up and down and in and out and all the other points of the compass including this and that. How do you know we want to go south from here? Tell me that and I'll find out where south is."

"Silver Cleaner, the Indian boy!" shouted Warde. "Grandson of the old Sioux Chief Gold Dust Twins.

I'll tell you why we have to go south. Livingston, where we ate our last meal on earth, is north of here. We turned south at Livingston; this is a branch that goes down to the Gardiner entrance of the Park. If we go south from here we're sure to strike the Park even if we don't strike Gardiner. The Park is about fifty miles wide. I don't know whether there's a fence around it or not. Anyway, if we go south from here we're sure to get into the Park."

"Maybe we'll land on Pelican's Dome," said Ed.

"Come face to face with Mr. Wilde, hey?" said Warde. "We'll say to Stove Polish, 'Oh, we don't know, when it comes to picking trails——'"

"Come on, let's start," said Westy.

"Sure," said Warde, "maybe they'll be naming canoes after us yet—Hiawatha, Carlylus, Westobus, Martinibo——"

"I wonder what Indian they named Indian meal after?" said Ed.

"You're worse than Roy Blakeley," said Warde; "they named it after the Indian motorcycle, didn't they, Westy, old scout?"

"You say you think the road runs south?" Westy asked.

CHAPTER VII

HOPES AND PLANS

"I SAY let's follow the road," said Westy. "We're pretty sure to come to some kind of a settlement that way. If we follow the tracks we might come to a place where we couldn't go any farther, like a high trestle or something like that. I wish we had a map. The road goes south for quite a distance, you can see that. What do you say?"

"Just whatever you say, Westy," said Ed.

"Same here," said Warde.

"Only I don't want to be blamed afterward," said Westy, looking about him rather puzzled and doubtful.

When he thought of Shining Sun, thirty miles seemed nothing. But when he gazed about at the surrounding mountains, the distance between them and the Park seemed great and filled with difficulties. He was already wishing for things the very existence of which was doubtless unknown to the Indian boy who had become his inspiration.

"Anyway," said Westy, "let's make a resolution. You fellows say you made one and left me out of it. Now let's make another one, all three of us. Let's decide that we'll hike from here to the Gardiner entrance without asking any help of any one. We'll do it just as if we didn't have anything with us at all."

"We haven't," said Warde.

"I mean even our watches and matches and things like that," said Westy. "Just as if we didn't even have any clothes; you know, kind of primitive."

"Don't you think I'd better hang onto my safety-pin?" Ed asked. "Safety first. An Indian might—you know even an Indian might happen to have a safety-pin about him."

Westy could not repress a smile, but for answer he pulled his store of matches out of his pocket and scattered them by the wayside. Warde, with a funny look of dutiful compliance, did the same. Ed, with a fine show of abandon and contempt for civilization, pulled his store of matches out of one pocket and put them in another. "May I keep my watch?" he asked. "It was given to me by my father when I became a back-yard scout."

"Back-yard scout is good," said Westy.

"Thank you muchly," said Ed.

"I mean all of us," Westy hastened to add.

It was funny how poor Westy was continually vacillating between these two good scouts who were with him and that unknown hero whose prowess had been detailed by the engaging Mr. Wilde. He was ever and again being freshly captivated by Ed's sense of humor and whimsical banter and impressed by Warde's quiet if amused compliance with this new order of things by which it seemed that the primitive was to be restored in all its romantic glory.

It never occurred to Westy to wonder what kind of a friend and companion his unknown hero, Shining Sun, would really be. What he was particularly anxious to do, now that the chance had come, was to show that cigar-smoking Philistine, Mr. Wilde, that boy scouts were really good for something when thrown on their own resources.

Pretty soon the first simple test of their scouting lore was made when they took their bearing by that vast, luminous compass, the sun. It worked its way through the dull, threatening sky bathing the forbidding heights in gold and contributing its good companionship to the trio of pilgrims. It seemed

to say, "Come on, I'll help you; it's going to be nice weather in the Yellowstone."

"That's east," said Westy. "We're all right, the road goes south and if it stops going south, we'll know it."

"If it's the kind of a road that does one thing one day and another thing the next day I have no use for it anyway," said Warde.

"When it's twelve o'clock I know a way to tell what time it is," said Ed. "Remind me when it's twelve o'clock and I'll show you."

The sun, which had not shown its face during the whole of the previous day, brightened the journey and raised the hopes of the travelers. To Westy, now that they were started along the road and everything seemed bright, their little enterprise seemed all too easy. He was even afraid that the road went straight to the Gardiner entrance of the park. He wanted to encounter some obstacles. He wanted this thing to have something of the character of an exploit.

Poor Westy, thirty miles over a wild country seemed not very much to him. It would be just about a two-days' hike. But he cherished a little picture in his mind. He hoped that Mr. Madison

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C. Wilde would be still at the Mammoth Hotel when he and his companions reached there, having traversed—*having traversed*—thirty miles of—having forced Nature to yield up——

“We can catch some trout and eat them, all right,” he said aloud.

“Oh, we can eat them, all right,” said Ed. “When it comes to eating trout, I’ll take a handicap with any Indian youth and beat him to it.”

“It’s going to be pleasant to-night,” said Westy. “We can just sleep under a tree.”

“I hope it won’t be *too* pleasant,” said Ed.

“You make me tired,” laughed Westy.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE WAY

To be sure, a hike of thirty miles is no exploit, not in the field of scouting, certainly. If the road went straight to the park, then the boys could hardly hope to face that doubter, Mr. Wilde, with any consciousness of glory.

On the time-table map which Westy had left in the train, the way from Livingston to Gardiner seemed very simple. A little branch of the Northern Pacific Railroad connected the two places with a straight line. And a road seemed to parallel this.

But maps are very seductive things. You have only to follow a road with your lead pencil to reach your destination. Nature's obstacles are not always set forth upon your map. Lines parallel on a map are often not within sight of each other on the rugged face of Nature. A little, round dot, a village, is seen close to a road. But when you explore the road the village is found to nestle coyly a mile or two back.

So if what the boys had undertaken was not so very *big*, at least it held out the prospect of being not so very little. But big or little, something *big* did happen among those lonely mountains that very day, an exploit of the first order. It was a bizarre adventure not uncommon in the Far West and it had an important bearing on the visit of these three scouts to the Yellowstone Park. And Westy Martin, hiking along that quiet, winding, western road, dissatisfied with himself because of what a chance acquaintance had said to him, was face to face with the biggest opportunity in all his young scout life. He did not know it, but he was walking headlong into it.

He had been proud when he had won the stalking badge. He was soon to know that this badge meant something and that it was no toy or gewgaw.

"I suppose it's pretty wild on Pelican Cone," said Warde, as they hiked along.

They were all cheerful for they were sure of their way for the present and were not disposed to borrow trouble. It was a pleasant summer morning, the sun shone bright on the rock-ribbed mountains, a fresh, invigorating breeze blew in their faces, birds sang in the neighboring trees, all Nature

seemed kindly disposed toward their little adventure.

As the railroad line left the roadside and curved away into a mountain pass, they felt a momentary lonesomeness, the trusty rails had guided them so far on the long journey. It was like saying good-by to a friend, a friend who knew the way. For a minute they conferred again on whether they should "count the ties," but they decided in favor of the road. So they went upon their adventure along the road, just as the great, thundering, invincible train had gone upon its adventure along the shining tracks.

"Yellowstone Park is just about like this," said Westy; "I mean the wild parts. Of course there are things to see there like geysers and all that, but I mean the wild parts; it's wild just like this. I suppose there are trails," he added with a note of wistfulness in his voice. "I suppose they know just where to go if they want to get a look at grizzlies. I'd be willing to give up the other things, you bet, if I could go on a trip like that. I was going to ask Mr. Wilde, only I knew he'd just guy me about it."

"We can see the film when it comes out anyway,"

said Ed, always cheerful and optimistic. "We can go up on Mount what-do-you-call it, Pelican——"

"Pelican Cone," said Westy. Already that hallowed mountain was familiar to him in imagination and dear to his heart. "Can't you remember *Cone*?"

"I can remember it by ice cream cone," said Ed. "What I was going to say was if that film comes to Bridgeboro we can go up on that cone for thirty cents and the war tax. What more do we want?"

"Sugar-coated adventures," said Warde.

"Sugar-coated is right," said Westy disgustedly.

"Now you've got me thinking about candy," said Ed. "I hope we can buy some in the Park."

"Do you suppose they have merry-go-rounds there?" Warde asked.

"Gee whiz, I hope so," said Ed. "I'm just crazy for a sight of wild animals. Imitation ones would be better than nothing, hey, Westy?"

"Imitation scouts are better than no kind," said Warde. "We're pretty good imitations."

"I wouldn't admit it if I were you," said Westy with the least suggestion of a sneer.

"A scout that gives imitations is an imitation scout," said Ed. "Dutch Cleanser is an imitation

scout; he imitates animals, Mr. Wilde West said so. That proves everybody's wrong. What's the use of quarreling? None whatever. Correct the first time. You can be a scout without knowing it, that's what I am."

"Nobody ever told you you were Daniel Boone, did they?" Westy sulked.

"They don't have to tell me, I know it already," said the buoyant Ed.

"Come on, cheer up, Westy, old boy," said Warde. "We came out here to see Yellowstone Park and now you're grouching because a funny little man with a cigar as big as he is that we met on the train says we're just playing a little game, sort of. What's the matter with the little game? We always had plenty of fun at it, didn't we? Are you going to spoil the party because a little movie man wouldn't take us up in the forest with him? Gee whiz, I wouldn't call that being grateful to the Rotary Club that wished this good time on us. I wouldn't call that so very big; I'd call it kind of small."

Westy gave him a quick, indignant glance. It was a dangerous moment. It was the ever-friendly, exuberant Ed who averted angry words and per-

haps prevented a quarrel. "If there's anything big anywhere around and it wants to wait till I get to it, I'll do it. I won't be bullied. I'm not going to run after it, it will have to wait for me. I'm just as big as *it* is—even more so. It will have to wait."

They all laughed.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROCKY HILL

THEY picked blackberries along the way during the hour or so preceding noon and made bags of their handkerchiefs and stored the berries in them. At noontime they sat down by the wayside and made a royal feast.

The country was rugged and in the distance were always the great hills with here and there some mighty peak piercing the blue sky. There was a wildness in the surroundings that they had never seen before. Perhaps they felt it as much as saw it. For one thing there were no distant habitations, no friendly, little church spires to soften the landscape. The towering heights rolled away till they became misty in the distance, and it seemed to these hapless wayfarers that they might reach to the farthest ends of the earth.

But the immediate neighborhood of the road was not forbidding, the way led through no deep ravines

nor skirted any dizzy precipices and it was hard for the boys to realize that they were in the Rocky Mountains. They lolled for an hour or so at noon-time and talked as they might have talked along some road in their own familiar Catskills.

One thing they did notice which distinguished this storied region from any they had seen and that was the abundance of great birds that flew high above them. They had never seen birds so large nor flying at so great a height. They appeared and disappeared among the crags and startled the quiet day with their screeching, which the boys could hear, spent and weak by the great distance. They supposed these birds to be eagles. Their presence suggested the wild life to be encountered in those dizzy fastnesses. The boys saw no sign of this, but their imaginations pictured those all but inaccessible retreats filled with grizzlies and other savage denizens of that mighty range. As Westy looked about him he fancied some secret cave here and there among the mountains, the remote haunt of outlaws and of the storied "bad men" of the West.

They hiked all day assured of their direction by the friendly sun. Now and again they passed a house, usually a primitive affair, and were tempted

to verify the correctness of their route by comforting verbal information. But Westy thought of Mr. Madison C. Wilde and refrained. They were not often tempted, for houses were few and far between. Once they encountered a lanky stranger lolling on the step of a shabby little house. He seemed to be all hat and suspenders.

"Shall we ask him if this is the way?" Warde cautiously asked.

"No," said Westy.

"I'm going to ask him," said Ed.

"You do——" said Westy threateningly, "and
——"

But before he had a chance to complete his threat, the blithesome Ed had carried out his fiendish purpose.

"Hey, mister, is this the way?" he said.

"Vot vay?" the stranger inquired.

"Thanks," said Ed.

"You make me tired," Westy said, constrained to laugh as they hiked along. "If that man could have spoken English——"

"All would have been lost," said Ed, "and we would be sure of going in the right direction; we had a narrow escape. That's because I was a good

scout; I saw that he was a foreigner; I remembered what it said in my school geography. *'Montana has been settled largely by Germans who own extensible—extensive farms—in this something or other region. The mountains abound in crystal streams which are filled with trout—that can easily be caught with safety-pins.'* It's good there's one scout in the party. If we had some eggs we'd fry some ham and eggs if we only had some ham; I'm getting hungry."

"Now that you mentioned it——" said Warde.

"How many miles do you think we've hiked?" asked Westy.

"I don't know how many you've hiked," said Ed, "but I've hiked about ninety-seven. I think we've passed Yellowstone Park without knowing it, that's what *I* think. Maybe we went right through it; the plot grows thicker. I hope we won't walk into the Pacific Ocean."

It was now late in the afternoon and they had hiked fifteen or eighteen miles. Once in the mid-afternoon they had heard, faint in the long distance, what they thought might be a locomotive whistle and this encouraged them to think that they were still within a few miles of the railroad line.

Westy would not harbor, much less express, any misgivings as to the reliability of the sun as a guide. Perhaps it would be better to say that he would not admit any inability on his part to use it. Yet as the great orb began to descend upon the mountain peaks far to the right of their route and to tinge those wild heights with a crimson glow, he began to imbibe something of the spirit of loneliness and isolation which that vast, rugged country imparted. After all, amid such a fathomless wilderness of rock and mountain it would have been good to hear some one say, "Yes, just follow this road and take the second turn to your left."

"That's West, isn't it?" Westy asked, as they plodded on.

"You mean where the sun is setting?" asked Warde. "Oh, absolutely."

"It sets there every night," said Ed, "including Sundays and holidays."

"Well then," said Westy, feeling a little silly, "we're all right."

"We're not all right," said Warde; "at least *I'm* not, I'm hungry."

"Well, here's a brook," said Westy. "Do you see—look over there in the west—do you see a little

shiny spot away up between those two hills? Away up high, only kind of between the two hills? It's only about half a mile or so. It's the sun shining on this brook away up there. That shows it comes down between those two hills."

They all paused and looked. Up among those dark hills in the west was a little glinting spot like gold. It flickered and glistened.

"Maybe it's a bonfire," said Warde.

"I think it's the headlight of a Ford," said Ed. "A Ford can go anywhere a brook can go."

"You crazy dub," said Westy.

"My social error," said Ed.

"What do you say we go over there?" Westy said. "Do you see—notice on that hill where all the rocks are—do you see a big tree? If one of us climbed up that tree I bet we could see for miles and miles; we could see just where the road goes. It's only about fifteen or twenty miles to the entrance of the park; maybe we could see something—some building or something. Then we could camp for the night up there and catch some fish. Wouldn't you rather not reach Gardiner by the road? Maybe we can plan out a short-cut. Anyway, we can see what's what. What do you say?"

"The fish part sounds good to me," said Ed.

"How are we going to cook the fish?" Warde asked.

Ed pulled out a handful of matches and exhibited them, winking in his funny way at Warde.

"I thought you threw them away," said Westy. "Do you think we couldn't get a fire started without matches?"

"A scout never wastes anything," said Ed. "The scouts of old never wasted a thing, I learned that out of the Handbook. Again it shows what a fine scout I am. Do you suppose Mr. Madison C. Wild West lights his cigars with sparks from a rock?"

"The Indians——" began Westy.

"The Indians were glad enough to sell Massachusetts or Connecticut or Hoboken or some place or other for a lot of glass beads," said Ed. "They would have sold the whole western hemisphere for a couple of matches. You make me weary with your Indians! I wish I had a chocolate soda now, that's what I wish. The Indians invented Indian summer and what good is it? It comes after school opens, deny it if you dare. Hey, Warde? If I'd lived in colonial days I bet I could have got the whole of Cape Cod for this safety-pin of mine."

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"Well, what do you say?" laughed Westy. "Shall we go up there and camp? And that will give us a chance to get a good squint at the country."

"Decided by an unanimous majority," said Ed.

"When do we eat?" said Warde.

"Leave it to me," said Ed slyly. And again he went through that funny performance of appearing to throw his matches away by pulling them nonchalantly from one pocket and depositing them in another. "If there are no trout up there I'll never believe the school geography again. I may even never go to school again, I'll be so peeved."

CHAPTER X

THE CAMPING SITE

THEY left the road and made their way across country toward the hills whose lofty peaks were now golden with the dying sunlight. They followed the brook which had flowed near the roadside up to where it came through a rocky cleft between two hills.

As they climbed up to the spot, the glinting light which had been their beacon faded away and only the brook was there, rippling cheerily over its stony bed. It seemed as if it had bedecked itself in shimmering gold to guide these weary travelers to this secluded haunt.

To be sure they had not penetrated far from the unfrequented road, but they were able now to think of themselves as being in the Rocky Mountains. The cleft through which the brook flowed was wide enough for a little camping site at its brink and here, with the rushing water singing its soothing

and incessant lullaby, they resolved to rest their weary bodies for the night.

One side of this cleft was quite precipitous and impossible of ascent. But the side on which the boys chose their camp site sloped up from the flat area at the brook side and was indeed the side of a lofty hill. It was on this hill that Westy had noticed the tree from the upper branches of which he had thought that he might scan the country southward, which would be in the direction of the park. A very much better view might have been obtained from neighboring mountain peaks, but the ascent of such heights would have been a matter of many hours and fraught with unknown difficulties. From the hill the country seemed comparatively low and open to the south.

"This is some spot all right," said Warde. "It looks as if Jesse James might have boarded here."

"Or William S. Hart," said Ed. "Anyway I think there are some fish getting table board here; it's a kind of a little table-land. If we can't get any trout we can kill some killies. I wonder if there's any bait in the Rocky Mountains? I bet the angle-worms out here are pretty wild."

"Hark—shh!" said Westy.

"I'm shhhhhing. What is it?" asked Ed.

"I thought I heard a kind of a sound," said Westy.

"I hope it isn't a grizzly," said Warde. "Do you suppose they come to places like this? Come on, let's gather some branches to sleep on; I know how to make a spring mattress. Is it all right to sleep on branches, Westy?"

It was funny to see Ed sitting on a rock calmly unraveling some worsted from his sweater, all the while with his precious safety-pin stuck ostentatiously in the shoulder of his shirt.

"It's good you happened to have your sweater on," said Warde.

"I hope I don't lose my railroad ticket now," said Ed. "I had it pinned in. I tell you what you do, Big Chief," he added, addressing Westy, and all the while engrossed with his unraveling process; "you climb up that hill and take a squint around and look for a patch of yellow in the distance. That will be Yellowstone Park. Look all around and if you see any places where they sell hot frankfurters let us know. By the time you get back we'll have supper ready, what there is of it, I mean such as it

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is. I'm going to braid this stuff, it's too weak. Look in the sink and see if there are any sinkers, Wardie."

"All right," said Westy, "because if I wait till after supper it might be too dark."

"If you wait till after supper," said Ed, "maybe the tree won't be there. We may not have supper for years. How do I know that fish are fond of red. I always told my mother I wanted a gray sweater, same color as fish-line, and she goes and gets me a red one. I wonder what Stove Polish catches fish with."

"Maybe with the string that Mr. Wilde West was stringing us with," said Warde.

"I guess I'd better go," laughed Westy.

CHAPTER XI

ALONE

WESTY was still laughing as he climbed the hill. He was thinking that these two companions of his were pretty good scouts after all. In his mood of dissatisfaction with himself and modern scouting, it had not occurred to him that being a good scout consists not in getting along with nothing, but in getting along with what you happen to have.

A little way up the hill he looked back and could see Ed sitting on a rock, one foot cocked up in the air with several strands of worsted about it. He seemed to be bent on the task of braiding these and there was something whimsical about the whole appearance of the thing which amused Westy and made him realize his liking for this comrade who was of another troop than his own.

Reaching the summit of the hill he saw that the tree he had seen from below was not as isolated as it had looked to be. It was a great elm and rose out

of a kind of jungle of brush and rock and smaller trees. These near surroundings had not been discernible from the distant road. A given point in Nature is so different seen from varying distances and from different points of view.

But the hill was not disappointing in affording an extensive view southward. There was no object in that direction which gave any hint of Yellowstone Park, but probably much of the wild scenery he beheld was within the park boundaries. It was significant of the vastness of the Park and of the smallness of Westy's mental vision that he had expected to behold it as one may behold some local amusement park. He had thought that upon approach he might be able to point to it and say with a thrill, "There it is!" He had not been able to fix it in his mind as a vast, wild region that just happened to have a tame, civilized name—*Park*.

There was something very peculiar about this great tree and Westy wondered if some terrific cyclone of years gone by might have caused it. Evidently it had once been uprooted, but not blown down. At all events a great rock was lodged under its exposed root, causing the tree to stand at an angle. It seemed likely that the same wind-storm

which had all but lain the tree prone had caused the rock to roll down from a slight eminence into the cavity and lodge there. Great tentacles of root had embraced the rock which seemed bound by these as by fetters. And under a network of root was a dark little cave created by the position of the rock.

Westy poked his head between the network of roots and peered into this dank little cell. It smelled very damp and earthy. Some tiny creature of the mountains scampered frantically out and the stir it caused seemed multiplied into a tumult by the darkness and the smallness of the place. Westy weakened long enough to wish he had a match so that he might make a momentary exploration of this freakish little hole.

His first impulse was to throw off his jacket before climbing the tree, but he did not do this. He was good at climbing and he shinned up the tree with the agility of a monkey. He rested at the first branch and was surprised to see how even here the view seemed to expand before him. He felt that at last he was doing something free from the contamination of roads and railroad tracks. He was alone in the Rockies. He had once read a boys' book of that title, and now he reflected with a

thrill that he, Westy Martin, was, in a sense, alone in the Rockies. Not in the perilous depths, perhaps, but just the same, in the Rockies. He wondered if there might be a grizzly within a mile, or two or three miles of him. *The Rockies!*

He ascended to the next branch, and the next. Slowly he climbed and wriggled upward to a point beyond which he hesitated to trust the weight of his body. And here he sat in a fork of the tree and looked southward and eastward where a vast panorama was open before him.

To the north and west was a near background of towering mountains, making his airy perch seem low indeed. But to the south and east he saw the West in all its glory and majesty. Mountains, mountains, mountains! Magnificent chaos! Distance unlimited! Wildness unparalleled! Such loneliness that a whisper might startle like a shout. It needed only the roar of a grizzly to complete this boy's sense of tragic isolation and to give the scene a voice.

From where he sat, Westy could look down into the cosy little cleft and see Ed Carlyle standing clearly outlined in the first gray of twilight; standing like a statue, hopefully angling with his converted

safety-pin and braided worsted. Warde was gathering sticks for their fire. Westy's impulse was to call to them, but then he decided not to. He preferred not to call, nor even see them. For just a little while he wanted to be *alone in the Rockies*.

So he did not call. He looked in another direction and as he did so his heart jumped to his throat and he was conscious of a feeling of unspeakable gratitude to the saving impulse which had kept him silent. For approaching up the hill from the direction in which he now looked were the figures of two men. And one glimpse of them was enough to strike horror to Westy Martin's soul.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE TWILIGHT

It required but one look at these two men to cause Westy devoutly to hope that they had not seen him. They were rough characters and of an altogether unpromising appearance.

One preceded the other and the leader was tall and lank and wore a mackinaw jacket and a large brimmed felt hat. But for the mackinaw jacket he might have suggested the adventurous western outlaw. But for the romantic hat with flowing brim he might have suggested an eastern thug. The man who followed him wore a sweater and a peaked cap, that dubious outfit which the movies have taught us to associate with prize fighters and metropolitan thugs.

But a more subtle difference distinguished these strangers from each other. The leader walked with a fine swinging stride, the other with that mean carriage effected by short strides and a certain tough swing of the arms. He had a street-corner de-

meanor about him and a way of looking behind him as if he were continually apprehending the proximity of "cops." He had an East-Side, police-court, thirty-days-on-the-island look. His companion seemed far above all that.

Westy moved not a muscle, scarcely breathed. The tree was evidently the destination of these strangers for they approached with a kind of weary satisfaction, which in the smaller man bespoke a certain finality of exhaustion. The leader evidently sensed this without looking behind him, for he referred to it with a suggestion of disgust.

"Yer tired?"

"I ain't used ter chasin' aroun' the world ter ducks, pal," said the other.

"Jes' roun' the corner; some cellar or other I reckon?" said the leader.

"Dat's me," replied the other.

By this time Westy was satisfied that they had not seen him before or during his ascent, and it seemed to him a miracle that they had not. Ludicrously enough he was conscious of a sort of disappointment that the taller man had not seen him, and this together with the deepest thankfulness for the fact.

There was something inscrutable about this stranger, a suggestion of efficiency and assured power. If Westy could have believed, without peril to himself, that his presence could not escape this man's eagle vision it would have rounded out the aspect of lawless heroism which the man seemed to have. It was rather jarring to see the fellow fail in a matter in which he should have scored. And this, particularly in view of his subsequent conversation. But Westy's dominant feeling was one of ineffable relief.

"There ain't no trail up here?" the smaller man asked, as he looked doubtfully about him.

"I never hide 'long no trails," the taller man drawled, as he seated himself on the rocky mound which was the roof of the little cave. "I telled yer that, pardner. I ony use trails ter foller others. Long's I can't fly I have ter make prints, but yer seen how I started. Prints is no use till yer find 'em. But ready-made trails 'n sech like I never use—got no use fer 'em. Nobody ever tracked me; same's I never failed ter track any one I set out ter track. When yer see me a follerin' a reg'lar trail yer'll know I'm pursuin', not pursued, as the feller says. Matter, pardner? Yer sceered?"

"A dog could track us all right," said the other. "He could scent us along the rails, couldn't he? Walkin' the rails for a mile might kid the bulls all right, but not no dog."

"Nobody never catched me, pardner, an' nobody never got away from me," drawled the other man grimly.

"They put dogs on, don't they?" the smaller man asked. He seemed unable to remove this peril from his mind.

"Yere, an' they take 'em off again."

"Well, I guess you know," the smaller man doubtfully conceded.

"I reckon I do," drawled the other.

"I ain't scared o' nobody gettin' up here," said the one who was evidently a pupil and novice at the sort of enterprise they had been engaged in. "But you said about dogs; sheriff's posse has dogs, yer says."

"They sure do," drawled the other, lighting a pipe, "an' they knows more'n the sheriffs, them hound dogs."

"Well, yer didn' cut the scent, did yer? Yer says 'bout cuttin' scents, but yer didn' do it, now did yer?"

For a few moments the master disdained to answer, only smoked his pipe as Westy could just make out through the leaves. The familiar odor of tobacco ascended and reached him, diluted in the evening air. It was only an infrequent faint whiff, but it had an odd effect on Westy; it seemed out of keeping with the surroundings.

"I walked the rail," said the smoker very slowly and deliberately, "till I come ter whar a wolf crossed the tracks. You must have seed me stoop an' look at a bush, didn't yer? Or ain't yer got no eyes?"

"I got eyes all right."

"Didn't yer see me kinder studyin' sumthin'? That was three four gray hairs. Then I left the rail 'n cut up through this way. It's that thar wolf's got ter worry, not me 'n you."

"Well, we done a pretty neat job, I'll tell 'em," said the smaller man, apparently relieved.

"Well, I reckon I knowed what I was sayin' when I telled yer it was easy; jes' like doin' sums, that's all; as easy as divvyin' up this here swag. Ten men that's a-sceered ain't as strong as one man that ain't a-sceered. All yer gotter do is git 'em rattled. Ony yer gotter know yer way when it's over."

"Yer know yer way all right," said the other, with a note of tribute in his voice.

"Yer ain't looked inside yet," said the master. "Neat little bunk fer a lay-over, I reckon. Ony kinder close. 'Tain't fer layin' low I likes it 'cause I like it best outside, 'n we're as safe here. Ony in case o' sumthin' gone wrong we got a hole ter shoot from. With me inside o' that nobody'd ever git inside of three hundred feet from it. I could turn this here hill inter a graveyard, I sure reckon. Yer hungry?"

"Supposin' any one was to find this here place?" the other asked. "You said 'bout sumthin' goin' wrong maybe."

"Well, he wouldn't hev the trouble o' walkin' back," said the tall man grimly.

Just then Westy, who had scarce dared to breathe, took advantage of the stirring of the strangers to glance toward his friends in the cleft. The little camping site looked very cosy and inviting. But even as he looked his blood ran cold and he was struck with panic terror. For standing at the brink of the rivulet was Warde Hollister, his hands curved into a funnel around his mouth, ready to call aloud to him.

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Westy held his breath. His heart thumped. Every nerve was tense. Then he heard the screeching of one of those great birds flying toward the crags in the twilight. He waited, cold with terror. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

WARDE AND ED

"DON'T call to him," said Ed. "As long as we haven't got our fire started yet, what's the use calling? He likes to be alone, sometimes; I know Westy all right. Don't call."

It was this consideration on the part of Ed for the mood and nature of his friend that saved Westy at the moment. And incidentally it saved Warde and Ed themselves from discovery. Westy knew his peril, but they did not know theirs.

Ed stood at the brink of the stream fishing, his partly unraveled sweater tied around his waist, giving a Spanish touch to his appearance. It was a funny habit of his to wear clothes the wrong way. He was always springing some ludicrous effect by freakish arrangement of his apparel. Warde was gathering sticks for their fire.

"Here's another killie," said Ed. "Small, but nifty. That makes seven so far, and about 'steen of

these other kind, whatever they are. Don't call till you have to. Westy had this little lonely stroll coming to him ever since Mr. Wilde West sprung that stuff on us. He likes to communicate with Nature, or commune or commute or whatever you call it. He's imagining he's hundreds and hundreds of miles off now—I bet he is. He's thinking what a punk scout he is. He likes to kid himself; let him alone, don't call."

"There's one thing I want to say to you," said Warde, "now we're alone. I guess you never quarreled with a fellow, did you?"

"Here's another killie—a little one," said Ed.

"Well, all I wanted to say was," said Warde, "I'd like to let you know that I think you're about as good an all-round scout as any there ever was, Indians, or I don't care what. Understanding everything in nature is all right, but understanding all about people is something, too. Isn't it?"

"I suppose it must be if you say so," said Ed. "This pin's only good for the little ones——"

"I mean you understand Westy, you know just how to handle him," said Warde. "Scouts have to deal with men, maybe wild men, just the same as they have to deal with nature, I guess. You can

read Westy like a—a—like a trail. Gee, in the beginning I was hoping Westy and I could come out here alone. Now I just can't think of the trip without you along. Do you *ever* get mad?"

"I get mad every time this blamed worsted breaks," said Ed.

"I know Westy's kind of—you know—he's kind of sensitive. He's awful serious about scouting. That Mr. Wilde just got him. Now he'll do something big if it kills him. And what good will it do him? That's what I say. Mr. Wilde will never see him again. You can't make Indians out of civilized white people, can you? Now he thinks none of us are regular scouts. And that's just what I want to tell you now while we're alone. I want to tell you that you're my idea of a scout; he is too, but so are you. What's your idea of a scout, anyway? I was kind of wondering; you're all the time joking and never say anything about it."

"I guess you might as well start the fire now," said Ed. "Thank goodness, he isn't here to see you using matches; he's mad at matches. Get the fire started good and then we'll give him a war-whoop. I'll clean the fish."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MASTER

WESTY knew that he was in great peril. He knew that these two men were desperadoes, probably train robbers, and that they would not suffer any one to know of their mountain refuge and go free. He believed that the odds and ends of conversation he had overheard related to one of those bizarre exploits of the Far West, a two-man train robbery; or rather a one-man train robbery, for it seemed likely that one of the men had not been an expert or even a professional.

For the leader of this desperate pair Westy could not repress a certain measure of respect; respect at least for his courage and skill. The other one seemed utterly contemptible. There is always a glamour about the romantic bad man of the West, dead shot and master of every situation, which has an abiding appeal to every lover of adventure.

Here was a man, long, lanky, and of a drawling

speech, whose eye, Westy could believe, was piercing and inscrutable like the renowned Two Pistol Bill of the movies. This man had said that no one could trail him and that no trail was so difficult that he could not follow it. Truly a most undesirable pursuer. One of those invincible outlaws whose skill and resource and scouting lore seems almost to redeem his villainy.

Westy knew that he was at the mercy of this man, this lawless pair. He knew that his safety and that of his friends hung on a thread. One forlorn hope he had and that was that darkness would come before the boys started their fire. Then these ruffians might not see the smoke. And perhaps they would fall asleep before Warde or Ed shouted. Then he could take his chance of descending and rejoining them. All this seemed too good to be possible and Westy had one of those rash impulses that seize us all at times, to put an end to his horrible suspense by making his presence known. One shout and—and what?

He did not shout. And he prayed that his friends would not shout. If he could only free himself and let them know! But even then there was the chance of this baffler of dogs trailing him and his com-

panions and shooting them down in these lonely mountains. And who would ever know?

And just then he learned the name of this human terror who was smoking as he lolled in the dusk on the rock below. He was evidently a celebrity.

"That's why they call me Bloodhound Pete," drawled the man. "Nobody can corral me up here; thar ain't no trail ter this place 'n nobody never knowed it. But I knowed of it. I ain't never come to it from the road, allus through the gulch 'n roun' by Cheyenne Pass, like we done jes' now. *But if you wuz here I could trail yer*, even if I never sot eyes on the place afore. I could trail yer if yer dealed me the wrong trick, no matter whar yer wuz."

"I ain't dealin' yer no wrong trick," said the other.

"That's why I ony has one pard in a big job," said Bloodhound Pete grimly. "'Cause in a way of speakin' I ain't fer bloodshed. I'd ruther drop one pardner than two or three. I don't kill 'less thar's need to, 'count o' my own safety."

Westy shuddered.

"Me 'n you ain't goin' ter have no scrap over the swag," said the other man.

"N' ye'll find me fair as summer," said the bloodhound. "Fair and square, not even sayin' how I give the benefit to a pardner on uneven numbers."

"Me 'n you ain't a-goin' ter have no quarrel," said the other. "Yer wuz goner drop that there little gent, though, I'm thinkin'," he added, "when he tried ter hold yer agin' the car door. He wuz game, he wuz."

"That's why I didn' drop 'im," said the bloodhound. "Yer mean him with the cigar? Yere, he was game—him an' the conductor. They was the ony ones. Them an' the woman—she was game. Yer seed her, with the fire ax. I reckon she'd a used it if I didn't take it from 'er. That thar little man had a permit or a license or sumthin' to ketch animals down over ter the Park. Here 'tis in his ole knapsack an' money enough ter buy a couple o' ranches."

"How much?" asked the other.

"I ain't usin' no light," said the bloodhound, "'count er caution. We'll sleep an' divvy up fair an' square in the mornin'."

"Suits me," said the other.

"And jes' bear in mind," drawled Bloodhound

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Pete, "that I allus sleep with one eye open an' I can track anything 'cept a airplane."

Westy shuddered again. He fancied the lesser of those two desperadoes shuddering. Bloodhound Pete seemed quite master of the situation.

CHAPTER XV

THE HAUNTING SPIRIT OF SHINING SUN

THIS was the kind of man that Westy had to get away from. For he found it unthinkable that he and his companions should be shot down and left in that wild region, a prey to vultures. He tortured himself with the appalling thought that perhaps the great bird he had just seen and heard was one of those horrible creatures of uncanny instinct waiting patiently among its aerial crags for the bodies of the slain; for him, *Westy Martin!*

He had been able to realize, or rather to believe, that he was alone in the Rockies. He had, in the few moments that he had been there, indulged the thrilling reflection that he was actually in the storied region where grizzlies prowled, and other savage beasts woke the echoes with their calls, where eagles screamed in their dizzy and inaccessible domains. He had thrilled to the thought that he was at least within the limits of that once trackless wonderland

of adventure where guides and trappers, famed in his country's romantic lore, had wrought miracles renowned in the annals of scouting.

But Westy had not carried these reflections so far as to include the reality which now confronted him. He had been a trapper for a few sweet moments; he had penetrated the wilds after Indians—in his imagination, which is always a safe place to hunt. And now suddenly here he was, actually *trapped* in the Rocky Mountains; the victim of cold-blooded desperadoes. His life hung by a thread. His killing would be a trifling incident in the aftermath of a typical western train robbery.

It was odd how ready his imagination had been to feast upon the perils of the Wild West and how his blood turned cold at this true Western adventure into which he was drawn. The day before, in his comfortable seat in the speeding train, he would have said that such a thing as this was just impossible. It would have been all right in the books; but as involving him, Westy Martin, why, the very thought of it would have been absurd.

Yet there he was. There he was, the thing was a reality, and he knew that every chance was against him. He wondered what Shining Sun, the red boy,

that silent master of the forest, would have done in this predicament. Then his thoughts wandered away from that exploited hero to his own pleasant home in Bridgeboro and he pictured his father sitting by the library table reading his evening paper. He pictured his father telling his sister Doris for goodness' sakes to stop playing the Victrola till he finished reading. Then Doris strolling out onto the porch and ejecting himself and Pee-wee Harris from the swinging seat and sitting down herself to await the arrival of Charlie Easton. . . .

He looked anxiously in the direction of the cleft, fearful that at any minute smoke would arise out of it or voices be audible there. The two men were talking below, but he could not see them now nor hear what they said. The whole thing seemed so strange, so incredible, that Westy could not appreciate the extraordinary fact that the very property, the wallet of his traveling acquaintance, Mr. Wilde, was in possession of these outlaws.

One slight advantage (it was not even a forlorn hope) seemed to be accruing to him. It was growing dark. This at least might prevent the smoke from the distant fire being seen. As for the blaze, that could not be seen from the foot of the tree be-

cause of the precipitous descent at the base of the hill. From his vantage point in the tree Westy would have been able to see the fire. But there was no blaze to be seen and he wondered why, for surely, he thought, they must have been able to catch some sort of fish.

Then in his distraction, he found a measure of relief in thinking of matters not pertinent to his desperate situation. He thought how after all Ed's safety-pin and braided worsted had probably not made good. This aroused again his morbid reflections about boy scouting. Shining Sun, without so much as a safety-pin, would have been able to catch fish, probably with his dexterous hands.

Westy was disgusted with himself and all his claptrap of scouting, when he thought of this primitive little master of the woods and water. Frightened as he was, he was reflective enough to be indignant at Mr. Wilde for that skeptic's irreverent use of the name of Stove Polish. Shining Sun was all but sacred to serious Westy.

CHAPTER XVI

A DESPERATE PREDICAMENT

THE peril from visible smoke was gone, but there was small comfort in this. Warde and Ed had probably not succeeded in catching any fish and a fire was therefore useless. Presently one or other of them would shout or come to investigate. And what then? Westy's life and the lives of his comrades seemed to hang on a thread.

He roused himself out of his silent fear and suspense and realized that if he were going to do anything he must act quickly. He was between two frightful perils. If he were to act, *do something* (he knew not exactly what), it must be before his friends called, yet not till the men below had fallen asleep. Haste meant disaster. Delay meant disaster. When should he act? And what should he do? If he had only a little time—a little time to think. What would the Indian boy do?

He listened fearfully, his heart in his throat,

but there was no sound. He was thankful that Ed Carlyle was not such a good scout—no, he didn't mean exactly that. He was glad that Ed was not exactly what you would call a *real*—no, he didn't mean that either. He was glad that Ed had not been scout enough—had not been able to catch any fish. There are times when not being such a marvelous super-scout is a very good thing.

Silence. Darkness. And the minutes passed by. He was jeopardizing his life and his companions' lives, and he knew it. If he waited till they shouted all three of them would be——

He could not bear to think of it. *Would be killed! Shot down!* He, Westy Martin, and his two pals.

What would Shining Sun do?

Well, he, Westy Martin, would act at once. He would take a chance, be brave, die game. He would, if need be, be killed in the Rockies, like so many heroes before him. He would not be a parlor scout. He had dreamed of being in peril in the Rockies. Well, he would not falter now. He could not be a Shining Sun, but at least he could be worthy of himself. He would not be wanting in courage, and he would use such resource as he had.

He could not afford to wait for a shout from the cleft. He must descend and trust to the men being asleep. He wished that Bloodhound Pete had not made that remark about sleeping with one eye open. He wished that that grim desperado had not unconsciously informed him that he could track anything but an airplane. Then it occurred to him that he might disclose his presence to these men, promise not to tell of their hiding place, and throw himself on their mercy. Perhaps they—the tall one at least—would understand that a scout's honor——

Honor! A scout's honor. What is that? Shining Sun was a scout, a *real* scout. What would *he* do? He would escape!

Westy listened but heard no sound from below. He hoped they were in the little cave, but he doubted that; it was too small and stuffy. A place to shoot from and hold pursuers at bay, that was all it was.

Silently, with an arm around an upright branch, he raised one foot and unlaced a shoe, pausing once or twice to listen.

No sound from below or from afar. Only the myriad voices of the night in the Rocky Mountains, an owl hooting in the distance, the sound of branches

crackling in the freshening breeze, the complaining call of some unknown creature. . . .

He hung the shoe on a limb, releasing his hold on it easily, then listened. No sound. Then he unlaced the other shoe and hung it on the branch. Strange place for a Bridgeboro, New Jersey, boy to hang his shoes. But Shining Sun wore no shoes, perish the thought! and neither would Westy. He removed his scout jacket with some difficulty and hung it on a limb, then he removed the contents of its pockets.

Westy Martin, scout of the first class, First Bridgeboro Troop, B. S. A., Bridgeboro, New Jersey, had won eleven merit badges. Nine of these were sewed on the sleeve of the khaki jacket in which he had traveled. This had been his preference, since he was a modest boy, and was disinclined to have them constantly displayed on the sleeve of his scout shirt which he usually wore uncovered. But two of the medals had been sewed on the sleeve of his shirt at some time when the jacket was not handy. These were the pathfinder's badge and the stalker's badge. So it happened that he carried these two treasured badges with him, when he left his

jacket hanging in the tree and started to descend upon his hazardous adventure.

He had received these two honors with a thrill of pride. But throughout this memorable day they had seemed to him like silly gewgaws, claptrap of the Boy Scouts, signifying nothing. They were obscured by the haunting spirit of Shining Sun.

For another moment he listened, his nerves tense, his heart thumping. Then he began ever so cautiously to let himself down through the darkness. A long, plaintive moan was faintly audible far in the mountain fastnesses. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

SOUNDS!

HALF-WAY down he thought he heard voices, but decided it was only his imagination taunting him. There was no sound below. He was fearful, yet relieved, when he reached the lowest branch; now there would be no branches squeaking, no crackling twigs, sounding like earthquakes in the tense stillness.

He paused a moment, his heart almost choking him. Suppose the men were not asleep. He was within easy pistol shot now, he could readily be discovered, a dark object clinging to the dark, branchless trunk. *A sound. A voice?* No, it was only his own haunting fear that spoke. In a few moments he would know the worst—or rather, perhaps, know nothing. With a kind of reckless abandon he let himself down, carefully, silently, inch by inch. He knew that any second he might hear a startled and aroused figure below him and fall limp, lifeless, to the ground.

He did not make a sound as he descended the trunk. And each uneventful moment gave him fresh courage. He was near enough to the ground now to hear the voices of the outlaws clearly, but he heard nothing. Nor could he see below anything but the dark mound of the rock outlined in the deeper darkness. His besetting fear now was that his companions might shout. It seemed incredible that they did not make some sound.

Westy's good sense became his ally now. His success so far gave him poise. He bethought him that bad men of the West, albeit they do big things, have also the habit of talking big. However it might have been with the taciturn pioneers of old, the bad men of the West (if the movies know anything about it) are incorrigible boasters.

This comforting thought did not mitigate Westy's fear of Bloodhound Pete. But it afforded him the solacing reflection that after all, in plain fact, no man can sleep with one eye open. This robber, and murderer if need be, was either asleep or not asleep. And if he was asleep then Westy knew he had a chance; perhaps a forlorn chance, but a chance. He took a measure of comfort from this application of his common sense.

And as he descended without interruption he began, all in that brief time, hopefully to consider the dubious prospect of escape from these ruffians. Would they sleep long? He could readily believe that Bloodhound Pete was invincible on the trail. Would immediate escape avail the boys anything?

With each measure of success comes a fresh measure of hope and courage. No news is good news. As long as nothing happens all is well. Westy put one cautious, hesitating foot upon the solid ground. He was face to face with his great adventure.

Thus he paused like the chameleon, one foot poised in air, the other upon the ground, motionless in the freak attitude of first alighting. He seemed fearful of placing his whole weight and both feet on the ground.

Then he stood beside the tree, a small, dark figure, his clothing torn, his legs and bare arms bleeding from scratches. He was hatless and barefooted. The tree, with a fine sense of scout picturesqueness, had caught his shirt and ripped it open in front, pulling off the buttons and exposing his brown, young chest. His trousers were all but in tatters. His hair was disheveled and it did not ill-become him.

He looked suitable to be in the Rockies. No one would have known him for a "parlor scout," playing the little outdoor game. . . .

Again he listened. There was no sound but the wailing far off. He was in the shadow of the tree, the trunk between him and the little cave, and he dreaded to move. Well, there was nothing left to do but take a chance and steal away.

Silence. A silence welcome, but fraught with terror. Surely these blackguards must be sleeping. But the sleeper who guards a treasure and fears pursuit enjoys not a peaceful slumber. Westy moved one leg preparatory to taking a step. How fateful each well-considered step! He felt the ground with his bare foot—pawed it. A twig which his shoe would have broken gave a little under the soft pressure, but caused no sound. He moved his foot from it and explored the ground near by. Then he took a step.

He paused and listened, his heart beating like a trip-hammer. He craned his neck and could just see the low entrance of the cave. It looked to be just an area of black in the surrounding darkness. Should he—yes, he felt the ground with his sensitive foot and took another step.

And now he paused, baffled by a new difficulty. For the moment he knew not which way to go. The darkness had closed in and rendered all directions alike. He could not for the life of him determine in which direction the cleft lay. He glanced about puzzled by this new doubt. Then he *thought* he knew. He made a long stride now so as to cover as much space as possible without touching ground, feeling the earth cautiously as his foot touched it. Then he moved—momentous step. He was a yard farther from the outlaws than he had been. So far so good. He gathered courage.

Then a thought occurred to him. Suppose these ruffians were taking turns at sleeping. Well, then he must be the more careful. He took another long, carefully considered step and listened. Only silence. He was on his way and all was well. Again he stepped—a long cautious stride. His nerves were on edge, but he was buoyant with the sense of triumph, of achievement.

Then suddenly his blood ran cold, and he paused, one foot in air, and almost lost his balance. One of the men had coughed. And there was a sound as of one stirring. . . .

CHAPTER XVIII

WESTY'S JOB

AGAIN Westy paused in frightful suspense. He knew that these men would not give him the advantage by calling, "Who's there?" In another second he might be dead. Would he hear the shot, he wondered. Does a person who is shot hear the shot that lays him low? Would he know if he were shot—in the head?

He paused, unable to move a muscle, haunted by these ghastly thoughts. Some one was evidently awake and listening. Should he risk it and take another step? Suppose a twig should crackle. If he took a long stride he might possibly lose his balance. It seemed to him that his very breathing could be heard, that those ruffians could count his heart-beats.

He put one foot forward, felt softly of the ground with his bare foot, pressed the uncertain earth a little, then took another step and felt that he had re-

moved himself still farther from peril. There was no sound, and he indulged the hope that the cough and the stirring had been in sleep.

He took several strides now and each was like a stimulant to him. He would not relax his caution, each step must be well considered, but he believed that he was moving in safety. He was, perhaps, fifteen feet from the tree, and his hope ran high. He began to think of his escape in the past tense and rejoiced in his achievement. If only his friends would not shout. . . .

Well, that was a narrow escape. He would always, he reflected, have something to tell. It had been like an evil dream; he could not bring himself to believe the reality of it. How his mother would shudder when he told her. But he would laugh and say, "All's well that ends well." He would say, "I'm here anyway." Probably Doris would not be too ready to believe him, and Charlie——

Then suddenly Westy thought of something. He was far enough from the tree now to think calmly, and in the flush and elation of his achievement, a rather chilling thought came to him. Is there any triumph in escape? Can any one who is running from peril ever think of himself in a heroic light?

Skillful such a thing might be. But after all is it a thing to tell about with pride?

Certainly, Westy bethought him, it was not a thing to tell with pride to Mr. Madison C. Wilde, if he should ever meet that Philistine again. To tell Mr. Wilde that he, Westy Martin, Boy Scout of America, had been within a dozen feet of that portly wallet, had even heard it spoken of! No, he could not do that. Of course he would have to tell of this affair, but he devoutly hoped that Mr. Wilde would be gone from the Mammoth Hotel at Hot Springs before he and his companions arrived.

He pictured to himself the way that Mr. Wilde would cock his head sideways in a manner of critical attention and screw his cigar over to the corner of his mouth as he listened to the heroic narrative in which would figure the whereabouts of his wallet. It seemed that this sagacious little man must be always haunting poor Westy. He had well nigh ruined his carefree young life with his homily on scouting *that isn't*. And now here he was again, a terrible specter with a cigar and a derby hat, stalking behind him and saying, "*What you have to do, you do.*"

That was in reference to the scouting and wilder-

ness miracles of Shining Sun. He had done things because he had *had* to do them or starve. Well, thought sober Westy, if disgrace is the alternative, it is just as bad. This sophisticated little stranger, Mr. Wilde, loomed up before him now and took the edge off a very credible achievement in scouting—escaping from train robbers in the Rockies.

Achievement! Westy had read about masterly retreats. They were conducted by military strategists, but not by *heroes*. They were skillful but not brave. To be a scout you must have the stuff that heroes are made of. And to be a hero you must *do something*, you must be *brave*. *What you have to do, you do*. Westy Martin knew in his heart what his job was. There was nothing glorious in running away from his job, however silently and fleetly he ran. If he was going to be a scout he must *do his good turn*. You cannot do a good turn to yourself. A good turn is like a quarrel, in a sense. It requires two people.

He might get away from these robbers, but he could not get away from Mr. Madison C. Wilde.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WAY OF THE SCOUT

MUCH of Mr. Wilde's bantering comment on the train had related to these same good turns. He had referred to the heroic act of mowing a neighbor's lawn or of pursuing some gentleman's recreant hat in a wind-storm. Well, here was the sort of good turn that would open his eyes. *To return him his wallet.*

Westy did not believe that he could do this. He seemed, by a miracle of good luck, to have attained a point of safety. Flight was possible now, and he had an idea which he thought would baffle pursuit. He had thought cautiously to take three or four long strides then run as fast as he could and rejoin his friends before one or other of them shouted to him.

Now the thought of a higher obligation deterred him, and he paused, gazing wistfully, yet fearfully, through the darkness in the direction where he had thought safety and permanent escape awaited him.

Then he glanced fearfully back at the tall black tree trunk, and considered that little distance he had achieved by his skill and deathlike silence.

That little distance represented more effort, certainly more strain, than would have been required to walk half a dozen miles. It seemed like a little bank account, a treasury of hard-earned safety. And now he was to squander this in a foolhardy attempt. He almost wished that a shout from his friends would take the matter out of his hands and give him an excuse for flight. Then he was ashamed of that thought.

With hesitating, reluctant step he drew nearer to the tree, cautiously, silently, pausing with each step to listen. He placed his hand over his heart as if to muffle its beating; it seemed as if the whole country could hear the thumping in his breast. In that little area surrounding the tree, Westy Martin was living a whole life. So intense was his concentration, so taut his nerves, that there seemed nothing, no interests, no world, outside this little sphere of action, where every move was fraught with ghastly peril. He placed each foot upon the ground and waited, as a chess player considers and waits before releasing his hold of the chessman.

Going from the tree each step had meant fresh assurance of safety. Going toward it each move meant greater peril. He could not rid his mind of the curiosity about whether he would *know it* if he were suddenly shot dead. Would he hear a sound first—a click, a stir? Was some one watching and listening even now, with pistol upraised and ready? *He, Westy Martin!* It seemed incredible, unthinkable.

Then he made an important decision. What trifles were such things to seem important, to stand between him and death. *Death!* He lowered himself to his hands and knees.

That would mean four points of contact with the ground instead of two, doubling the danger of sound. But it would lower his height. It was the carriage of the animals, and Westy had read that it is always best to imitate the animals when one's purpose is similar to that of an animal. He remembered that a cat in stealing up on a bird holds its body as close to the ground as possible.

Then, in the tenseness of his fear, an irrelevant thought came to him. It was odd how irrelevant thoughts relating to the outer world came to him in this desperate situation. Perhaps his thought about

the cat and the bird suggested it. He remembered reading how the famous Wright Brothers, pioneers in aviation, had learned to make their first airplane by studying the flight of birds. Then he thought how Bloodhound Pete had declared that he could track anything but an airplane. Westy smiled; a ghastly, terror-haunted smile, but he smiled. He was thinking of his scheme for eluding pursuit if he should ever be so fortunate as to be in flight.

He crept around the tree trunk and peered into the dark opening of the tiny cave.

CHAPTER XX

A FATAL MOVE

As Westy peered around the tree he beheld something which at first shocked him, then relieved his nervous tension somewhat. Just outside the entrance of the cave was a face upturned toward the sky. At first he saw nothing but this face framed in darkness; it seemed to have no body connected with it. He could not see it well enough to distinguish the features, but he could make out that it bore a flowing mustache. Nor could he see whether the eyes were open, but he assumed they were not, for the posture of the head was certainly not that of one on guard.

At first Westy thought that the man might be looking up into the tree ready to shoot, not knowing that he, Westy, had descended. He had enough presence of mind to look about for anything that glistened, but could discover no betraying glint of a pistol.

Strangely enough, the sight of this upturned face, grim and ghastly because only hazily revealed in the blackness, reassured him. It was a jarring sight, but better than uncertainty.

Cautiously, testing every move, he crept a few inches closer. The face seemed to move, yet still lay stark, staring like a dead man at the starless heaven. It was only the faint shadow of a fluttering twig crossing that motionless face.

Westy crept a few inches closer. And then, suddenly, he realized that Bloodhound Pete *was on guard*. He was on guard in his sleep. He was not sleeping with one eye open. But he was on guard with both eyes closed. He was sleeping in the little hole which formed the entrance of the cave. His body, as well as Westy could make out, was mostly within the dank little retreat; only his head and shoulders were outside. It would have been impossible to pass by him, in or out.

So small was the opening that dangling tentacles of root hung low above his face like loathsome snakes, and as they swayed in the breeze caused tiny shadows to play upon his motionless countenance, producing a ghostly and startling effect. It seemed evident that his companion was a prisoner within;

he could not have escaped except across the prone body of his comrade. Thus Bloodhound Pete guarded, even in his sleep, the accomplice whose services had probably been necessary to him. He seemed to Westy to have an uncanny power.

The boy wondered whether this little cell was a favorite resort of the outlaw because exit from it could be so conveniently and unsuspectingly embarrassed. Certainly Bloodhound Pete, having reached his chosen lair, had very little fear of danger from without. He had reckoned on the country, but he had not reckoned on the tree.

Westy approached now near enough to touch that motionless face. He was all a-tremble. Yet his proximity had at least this advantage. He could not be shot down unawares—the thing he had dreaded. If the man moved he would know it. A man cannot snatch his senses so quickly from sleep as to be able to shoot instantaneously. He would have at least a few seconds of grace.

He did not dare to move now; he paused and looked about. Oh, if his heart would only stop thumping; it sounded like an engine to him. Cold drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead. His hands were icy cold. He swallowed nervously.

and it seemed that this would arouse echoes from the surrounding hills. He remembered the odd phenomenon that standing close to a sleeping person often causes the slumberer to open his eyes. The very atmosphere of a human presence may arouse one.

Westy knew that he must not stand there courting such perils. Yet he knew not what to do next. Certainly he could not enter the cave nor rummage in this creature's pockets. He could make one move nearer; it would avail him nothing, but he could do it. Possibly he might discover a way—something——

He lifted his left hand from the ground, moving it forward, and at the same time his right knee was instinctively raised by a sort of nervous correspondence. He was ready to move forward. So far as he was concerned, he had confidence now; he knew he would not make a sound. He could settle hand or knee upon the earth with the silence of death. But the breeze was blowing the foliage and now and then crackling a little twig near by. Westy paused. It seemed as if an electrical current were coursing through his lifted arm.

Far off somewhere in the untrodden fastnesses of

the mighty range was that moaning he had heard before. For a second, two, three seconds, he paused, tense, trying to control his panting breaths. Then slowly he advanced his hand and lowered it upon—something soft and warm. . . .

Panic seized him with the realization that he had miscalculated in the darkness and was pressing his hand upon that dark, outstretched form.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE DARKNESS

BUT there was no movement of the sleeper.

Westy clutched the warm, dark thing and retreated, or rather shrank back. He paused, watching, listening, and moved backward a few feet. Was it safe to stand? He could do this silently, but would not the radical change of posture arouse the sleeper? Might not it stir the air enough to—No—yes, he would.

He drew himself to his feet, silent, trembling. Then he backed away a few paces more, clutching the thing on which his groping hand had descended. He knew what it was now. It was the mackinaw jacket of Bloodhound Pete which had been folded up for use as a pillow. In his sleep the outlaw's head must have rolled off it and that but a minute or two prior to Westy's approach for, as we know, the spot on which the cautious hand of the scout had descended was still warm.

Now Westy's heart beat frantically, but with a new suspense, with imminent triumph and elation. Hurriedly he put his hands into the pockets of the jacket and presently, wonder of wonders, stood under the black sky, alone in the Rockies, with the big wallet of Mr. Wilde, the Philistine, gripped in his soil-covered hands. And still he heard the distant wailing. It seemed to him that that savage voice in the night ought to change or cease, in view of his triumph; that the Rocky Mountains should take notice of this thing that he had done. He seemed to be in Aladdin's Cave or on the brink of Captain Kidd's treasure hole, or in a dream.

Westy felt of the big wallet, smelled of it; it was real, it was leather. He blinked his eyes and knew he was awake. Silently, oh, with such joyous caution, he stole a few paces farther from the tree. Suppose Warde or Ed should call now. *Warde! Ed!* It seemed as if he had not seen them for years.

Again he clutched the wallet to make sure it was substantial. It was very substantial; Mr. Wilde did not deal in the ethereal. Well, then (Westy gulped with nervous elation as he tried to formulate the fact in orderly fashion in his mind) he, Westy Martin, scout of Bridgeboro, New Jersey, had in

the twentieth century when there are autos and electric lights and radios and things—he, Westy Martin, had outwitted a desperado, a wild western train robber in the Rocky Mountains and recovered a quantity of booty—he, *Westy Martin!*

Suppose, just suppose his friends should call to him now! This thought aroused him to the realization that he was not yet out of danger, that every second's delay jeopardized his triumph. He took a few long strides with utmost caution as before, then paused again, listening. Everything seemed to be quiet and he gave way to a little, silent, incredulous laugh, the whole affair seemed so unreal, so at odds with his simple young life. He had a queer feeling that this was not his own experience. His first relaxation after what he had done was this silent, mirthless laugh. Then he gathered himself together, assured himself of his direction and started running with all his might and main.

A few moments should have brought him to the cleft, but he ran for five minutes as fast as he could, yet did not reach it. He knew he was going down hill and he was sure he was running in the direction in which the lowest branch of the tree pointed. He remembered noticing that branch in the day-

light and now in his flight he had made assurance doubly sure by noticing where it pointed.

Yet he did not reach the cleft. He ran a little farther, then paused, bewildered, anxious. Here was a fine state of things! *He was lost*. His friends would shout, would undoubtedly ascend the hill in search of him. They would either be heard or would stumble onto that desperate pair of robbers. What was he to do now? Where was he? Wherever he looked there was only darkness. Standing still he could not even be sure about the slope. He ran a little to make sure of this. Yes, he was running *down*; he could tell by the way each foot struck the ground. He ran a little further, then paused irresolute.

Silence, darkness; darkness impenetrable. Westy tried to believe that he could see the outline of a mountain he had noticed in the daylight. He remembered where this was in relation to the cleft. It seemed like blackness hovering in blackness; there was no real outline, it was all elusive. He became greatly agitated. To be baffled like this in the very fullness of his achievement galled him to distraction.

He was seized with a rash impulse to scream and let happen what would. He was within hearing

of four people, yet he could not shout. He wondered what would happen if he did shout, or if his comrades shouted. If one of them shouted *just once*, he might run with all his might and main to them and prevent a second shout. But even one shout would be perilous business. He was panic-stricken.

How easily Shining Sun would have sped to his destination through wilderness and darkness! With what unerring instinct that hero of the wilds would have extricated himself from this predicament. "Shining Sun with a coat full of money and things." Westy laughed nervously. Shining Sun and money seemed not to go together at all. He was of the race that sold vast tracts of country for glass beads and trinkets.

It was only in a nervous way, caused by his perplexity and panic, that Westy thought then of the Indian boy who had haunted him as much as Mr. Wilde had. Such thoughts jump in and out of the troubled and preoccupied mind like spirits.

He was now on the verge of utter panic. He ran a few paces, paused, then ran a few paces in another direction. In this way he became the more confused. He had no more idea of his direction

than he would have had at midnight on the trackless ocean. He had escaped from the outlaws. But the Rocky Mountains had caught him. The one thing to deliver him out of this penetrable blackness was his voice, and that would only betray him to criminals as black as the night itself. He stood stock still, not knowing what to do, cold with desperation, his morale gone; a pitiful spectacle.

The Rocky Mountains had him by the throat.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FRIENDLY BROOK

THEN he heard a voice. It was not the voice of either of his comrades, nor was it the voice of either outlaw. It was a voice soft and low, the voice of the Rocky Mountains calling to him the way to go; the scarce audible murmur of the stream far in the distance.

To Westy the sound was as welcome as a log would be to a man drowning. He heard it, a low, steady ripple, far in the fathomless night. Here was a voice he need not fear, thrice welcome voice that would guide him to his friends and arouse no one.

He ran now in the direction of this distant sound. Now and again he had to pause and listen, so faint was it. Once, when the fitful breeze was wrong, he could not hear it. He paused in the still, lonesome night, caught the faint murmur, and hurried on.

He was not running down hill, that was sure.

But the murmur of the brook was louder now; he was approaching it. Soon it had swelled into a merry, little song with an accompaniment of splashing as it hurried over rocks. The cheery preoccupation of the rushing stream was in odd contrast to all about; it seemed so carefree and intent there in the very neighborhood of the most harrowing experience of Westy's life. It was quite happy and at home, alone in the Rockies.

Presently he reached it and knew that he was at a point about half a mile below the cleft. Instead of going straight toward the cleft he had descended the hill southward, converging toward the brook, and reaching it at a point where it had flowed down into comparatively level country. He stood near a large rock which he remembered passing when they had followed the stream up to the cleft.

And now, nerve-racked and fatigued in body, his bare feet sore and bleeding, Westy paused for just a moment to make sure of his direction. He knew where he was, the rock was like an oasis in the trackless desert, and the brook was like a trail. But he was not going to trifle with his good fortune now. He would verify every surmise. He would not make a mistake in his elation. He could

see nothing. In which direction, then, was the cleft?

He was almost certain about this; yes, of course he was certain; he laughed at the thought of there being any doubt about it. He found it easy to laugh. Yet if the cleft lay upstream—— Well, first he would determine which way was *upstream*.

And just then Westy Martin showed what kind of a scout he was. He was just about to step into the water to *feel* which way it flowed when something deterred him. In that brief second of inspired thought he was the scout par excellence. Instead of stepping into the brook he laid a twig in the water and watched it hurry away in the rippling current. Of course he was right about the direction of the flowing water, the twig confirmed his assurance of this.

Well then, why could he not, looking upstream, see the light of his companions' fire in the cleft? In the afternoon, from this point, they had seen the very spot where they later camped. He was puzzled and looked in the other direction—downstream. There was no spark anywhere, only dense blackness.

Well, he was sure anyway; he could not be mistaken. He knew which way was upstream and his

friends were there, light or no light. They were there *if nothing had happened to them*. What *could* have happened to them?

Well, he was sure and he would play his trump card. He would show Bloodhound Pete that there was at least one thing besides an airplane that he could not trail. He took his next momentous step as thoughtfully as he would have spent his last dollar. He stooped and selected a spot where an area of soft earth bordered the stream. Here his footprints would be clear. Then he walked into the stream, approaching it not squarely, but *converging toward* it at an angle.

He entered the water facing upstream so as to give the impression that this was his direction, as indeed it was, as far as the cleft. If he turned in the water and retraced his course, no one would see the footprints disclosing this maneuver. The friendly brook had guided him and now he used it as his good ally. Once in the stream he could move in *either direction* and no one would know in which direction he moved. A pursuer would think that he had gone upstream.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CUT TRAIL

WESTY found the water refreshing to his bare, scratched feet. And he was happy now and hopeful. He was puzzled about not seeing a light, but he would not worry about that. He was proud of what he had done; it had a flavor of real scouting about it—if it worked. He had deliberately given a clew to his direction, and for the time being this constituted a peril. But he could retrace his steps without its being known and escape south while his pursuers were proceeding north. Eluding pursuit was just a question of getting away quickly now.

His little subterfuge acted like a tonic to his exhausted nerves and weary body. He was having some fun. His success so far and the need of haste were exhilarating. He hurried along through the cool, murmuring, enveloping water, feeling indeed that this little Rocky Mountain brook was his friend. There were no telltale footprints now for the grim, invincible outlaw to follow; *he had cut his*

trail. He liked that expression *cut his trail*. It was every bit as good as the coyote stunt. . . .

Soon the rocks began enclosing him, and the brook flowed swiftly and noisily. He could feel the swish of the oncoming water against his ankles. In a few moments he was bucking a tiny waterfall, and it was hard for him to lift himself up over the mossy, slippery rocks. But he kept in the stream; nothing could have tempted him out of its protection.

He was climbing up where he and his two companions had climbed late that afternoon, except that he was in the water. He knew the spot well enough, even in the dark. It seemed an age since he had seen his friends. His return was almost like going home to Bridgeboro. If he could only know they were there! Suppose they had gone searching for him on the hill!

At this appalling thought he paused and listened, fearful of hearing a pistol shot in the darkness. But all he could hear was the rippling water merrily covering his tracks. What he did not realize was that he was confusing actual time with the strain he had been under. He had lived a whole lifetime in less than an hour, and he seemed to have been absent from his comrades for days.

Soon the narrow way he had been climbing spread into the cleft, with the slope on one side, the precipitous wall on the other, and the little area of shore on either side of the stream. The place looked different in the darkness, but he knew it.

"Warde—Ed—are you here?" he scarce more than whispered.

There was no answer.

"Where are you, anyway?" Westy asked, emboldened by his fright to speak louder.

There was no answer.

He knew not what to do now; he dared not leave the water to investigate and he could see little in the dense darkness. He peered about trying to penetrate the night with his eyes. Thus he was able to distinguish something, he knew not what, on the shore not far distant. He spoke again in a hoarse whisper and listened. Only the cheery little brook answered him. He thought the something, whatever it was, had not been there before.

Well, if it was a rock he would soon know. He picked a pebble out of the brook and threw it at the uncertain, intangible mass. It made no sound. He picked up a larger one and threw it and was rewarded by an unpretentious and complaining grunt.

Thus, encouraged and greatly relieved, he selected his third missile with a view to immediate and emphatic results.

"Wasmatanyway," he heard in the darkness, accompanied by an unmistakable stirring.

Westy's first impulse was to be angry but he realized at once that the slumber of his friends had probably saved all their lives. He realized too, as he had not realized when he left them, how dog-tired they all had been.

"Who's—wass—there?" stammered Warde, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "I bes a grizzly, wake up, Ed, you ole——"

"Shut up," said Westy. "Wake up and stand up quick and do what I tell you. Stand up and don't move. We're in danger! *Stand up and don't move, do you hear?* Shake Ed and make him stand up—and stand just where you are. Hear?"

Fortunately Warde was in that compliant mood induced by half sleep. He shook Ed and soon both of them were on their feet.

"Now do what I tell you, *quick*," said Westy. "For goodness' sake grab hold of Ed so he don't topple over again. Do you hear me—do you understand? Get awake and do—stand where you are,

can't you—now listen, both of you. Do you want to see Yellowstone Park or do you want to be trailed and shot?"

"What's matter with you?" Warde asked mildly, in amiable drowsiness.

"J'get any frankfurters?" asked Ed, emerging into consciousness. "I remind myself (yawn) of the (yawn) of the sleeping sickness, I'm so dopey. You back, Westy, old boy? Glasseeyer."

"I'd be mad at you only maybe you saved my life," said Westy. "I suppose I have to be grateful."

"You're entirely welcome," yawned Ed. "'N' many of 'em—*absolootly*."

CHAPTER XXIV

DOWNSTREAM

"Now listen," said Westy. "I'll tell you afterward. Are you awake enough to have some sense?"

"You addressing me?" said Ed. "Don't you want some—some kind of fish? I caught about a dozen, didn't I, Warde?"

"Never mind the fish," said Westy; "do what I tell you and be careful. Walk slantingways toward the brook—*upstream*—and walk into the brook that way. Step in as if you were walking *upstream*. All right, that's all right. Now come down toward me—*keep in the water*, whatever you do."

It was a bewildered but obedient pair that waded downstream toward Westy. They had approached the brook against the current and entered it at an angle suggestive of continuing in that direction. Then, dutifully, they had turned and approached Westy.

"Is it all right to bring my safety-pin?" asked Ed.

"Follow me," said Westy.

"I demand an explanation," said Ed. "I fished and caught some fish with my safety-pin, then we waited for you before starting a fire——"

"Yes, thank goodness for that," said Westy.

"We fell asleep, waiting," said Warde; "we were good and tired."

"We tried to keep awake telling Ford stories," said Ed. "Did you ever hear that one about—what's the matter anyway, are we pinched?"

"Listen," said Westy, "and stop your fooling. I'll tell you now, though every minute counts, I can tell you that. There are two robbers camped under that big tree, they're asleep——"

"I don't blame them," said Ed. "I was asleep myself."

"*Listen*," said Westy, impatiently. "They came under the tree—*listen*—they came under the tree after I was up in it, and I heard their talk. Maybe you think I didn't have some narrow escape! They had robbed the train we were on—listen! I can't tell you the whole business now, but anyway I've got Mr. Wilde's wallet and his permit and everything. I had a jacket or something or other—I guess it was—it belonged to one of them—

listen—I had—I pulled it from near one of them—Bloodhound Pete—that's his name—I don't know where it is now—don't ask me—back up there I guess—I was so excited—but I've got the wallet—you needn't believe it if you don't want to. One of those—one of those men—Blood—Bill—Pete—I mean Bloodhound—Bloodhound Pete—can track anything—I heard him say so.

“Now you fellows follow me and don't either one of you set a foot on dry land. We're going down, not up. When we get past the place where I left my footprints on the shore, we'll be all right, that's what I think. If they think we followed the stream they'll follow it up. See? Now come on and hurry.”

Thus the trio that had arrived in the cozy, little cleft, which had seemed to be made for a camping spot, left it in fear and haste, having eaten not one morsel there. In single file they hurried along through the protecting water, Warde and Ed thoroughly aroused by the peril which beset them.

They were not hungry, despite their rather long fast. Nor were they inclined to talk until they had passed the rock near which Westy had entered the water. Even Ed's cheery mood seemed clouded by

the seriousness of their situation. Not even Westy's exploit of recovering the wallet, nor the thrilling details of his adventure, were matter for talk. They moved along, a silent little procession, clinging, trusting to this one hope of safety, the water. So they trod on, silent, apprehensive.

The brook was not only their concealment, but their guide, and they followed its winding course through the darkness with but the one dominating thought, to place themselves beyond the peril of capture. After a little while they reached the point of the brook's intersection with the road and paused to consider whether now it might be safe for them to forsake the stream's uncertain pathway and resume their former line of travel.

They decided to stick to the brook for wherever it led, even through the somber and bewildering intricacies of the forest, it at least would not betray them into the hands of murderers. At last, after three hours of wading, their uneventful progress had cheered them enough for Ed to remark:

"We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way."

"I guess everything's all right," said Warde.

"Don't be too sure," said Westy.

"Well, anyway, I'm feeling encouraged enough to be hungry," said Ed. "I just happened to think of it. I've got my little string of fish with me—if I ever have a chance to cook them."

"How many miles do you suppose we've walked in this brook?" Warde asked.

"I don't know how far *you've* walked in it," said Ed, "but *I've* walked in it ninety-two and eleven-tenth miles. I think it runs into the Gulf of Mexico."

"Nix," said Westy.

"No? Then it runs into the kitchen sink."

"It runs into a lake and we're coming to it," said Westy. "We've been walking over three hours. Shall we take a chance and camp there?"

"Either that or we walk right into the lake, don't we?" asked Ed. "If I'm going to do that, I'd like to know it beforehand if it's all the same to you."

"What do *you* say, Warde?" Westy asked.

"I'm too tired to say anything," said Warde. "If those friends of yours were to come and shoot me, I couldn't be any more dead than I am now."

"Correct the first time," said Ed.

Soon the brook began to broaden out and presently the fugitives for the first time found them-

selves in water too deep for wading. They were almost at the edge of a sheet of water, black as ink, where it lay surrounded by precipitous hills. A more desolate spot one could hardly imagine. It was easy to believe that they were the first human beings to lay eyes on it.

"Well," said Westy doubtfully, "I guess it's all right; anyway, I guess we can't go any farther, I'm all in."

"If we don't get out of this water, we'll be all in," said Ed. "I'm up to my knees already. So far I'm not so stuck on Yellowstone Park. Maybe it'll seem better when I see it."

"I'd like to know where we are," said Warde. "I bet we've walked ten miles anyway."

"Well," said Westy, "let's camp on shore and have some eats. They may be asleep yet and anyway, they couldn't find us here."

It was amusing how distance and utter weariness seemed to diminish the terrible power of Bloodhound Pete. He and his imprisoned accomplice seemed very far away, and effectually baffled, should they undertake pursuit. And as Westy and his two companions settled down to make a second camp and prepare their belated meal, the peril they had

feared grew less and less and, in proportion as it ceased to dominate their minds, Westy's exploit loomed large. And his two friends, sitting about their little camp-fire, reflected upside down in the still lake, examined the wallet of Mr. Madison C. Wilde, the Philistine, as if it were some relic from Aladdin's Cave.

CHAPTER XXV

LITTLE DABS OF GRAY

So at last they cooked the fish. Warde cleaned them with his jack-knife on a flat stone while Westy and Ed gathered enough wood for a little fire. Westy was now so affluent in heroism, and had so far regained his poise in consequence, that he could stand calmly by and witness the civilized proceeding of lighting a fire with a match. Or perhaps he was too weary and hungry to experiment with any of those primitive devices for striking a spark with Nature's raw materials.

And it might be observed that if you should happen to have escaped from train robbers in the Rocky Mountains and have walked a dozen miles more or less in the night, a mess of fish cooked loose upon a wood fire is not half bad. You will find them charred and tasting of smoke (which is well) and elusive when subjected to the rules of table etiquette. They crumble and fall apart and have to be sought

for in the glowing fastnesses of consuming wood and extracted like the kernels of hickory nuts. They have to be caught all over again. But they are delicious—if you have lately escaped from train robbers in the Rocky Mountains.

In such a country as they were in one is much less likely to suffer from cold and exposure at night, notwithstanding the biting air, than in some tamer woodland where the ruggedness of Nature offers no natural shelters and wind-breaking rocks.

The boys, refreshed by their meal, but staggering from fatigue, walked around the little lake in search of a shelter along the precipitous shore. They found a place which seemed to have been made for three weary scouts, a place which, as Ed remarked, any boarding-house keeper in the East could get ten dollars a week for. It was not high enough to sit up in, but none of them felt like sitting up. Only a few pine branches were necessary to transform this little recess into a dormitory. And here the three award boys slept with a profundity which there is no word in any language capable of describing.

It was midmorning when Westy awoke, finding his companions still sleeping soundly. His joints

were stiff and he found it soothing to his knees to hold his legs out straight. But he was not exactly tired. It was the aftermath of fatigue.

The sun was well up over the little mountain lake, glinting the water as it made its slow progress across the blue sky. How cheering it was! It seemed to radiate hope. How companionable—like a friend from home. The same genial sun that rose over the hills at Temple Camp and flecked the lake there with its glinting light. And here it was in the Rocky Mountains! What a change it wrought in the country and in the award boy's spirit. Oh, he could do anything now, and all was well!

He stretched one leg out stiff and held it that way and lingered upon the ineffable relief that this afforded his knee.

Westy did not know how far they had walked in the brook during the night, nor in what direction, but the great mountains seemed still to be far away. He tried to identify the landscape with that he had last been able to see, which was from his vantage point in the big elm, but there was nothing recognizable now, only the brook.

He had thought that perhaps daylight would find them amid the wild fastnesses they had seen

from a distance. But as he looked about he saw that the immediate neighborhood was not forbidding though it was wild and unpeopled. Could it be that he was in the heart of the Rockies? In such a place as Lewis and Clark, for example, had camped in their adventurous journey of exploration? The Rockies that he had dreamed of were always in the distance, holding themselves aloof as it seemed, from these hapless pilgrims. It was strange. Was he, in fact, *in the Rockies*?

He was, indeed, only the Rockies were too big for him. He had expected to find them under his feet. He had thought of them as something quite limited and distinct. Of course, there were dizzy heights and remote passes, terrible in their primeval wildness, and these it was not vouchsafed him to visit. But he was in the vast, enchanted region, just the same. Had he not escaped from train robbers in these very wilds? He, Westy Martin?

He felt in his pocket and made sure of the precious wallet of which he was the proud custodian. It was there, smooth and bulging; the whole thing was real. He had slept and awakened and the whole thing was real. If he had shot a grizzly, as *Dan Darewell in the Rockies* by Captain Dauntless had

done, he could hardly be more incredulous of his own achievement. He began to reflect how it had all happened.

He was glad that the others were not yet awake. Their sprawling attitudes bespoke rest rather than grace. There seemed no danger of their rousing. He did not know whether they were farther from the Yellowstone Park than they had been the day before or nearer to it. If their journey of the night had tended in a fairly straight course toward it then they might be now within four or five miles of it, perhaps even less.

There was no particular direction which attracted Westy's gaze; he just gazed about. Mountains, mountains, mountains! They appalled him. He could see the mountains, but not the way through them. And they seemed impenetrable. One thing did attract his attention; this was a great tree far off, one of those big, lonely trees which serve as landmarks. From the position of the sun he thought this was south. But this fact afforded him no enlightenment. East, west, north, south, were all the same; there was no telling where Yellowstone Park was.

Then suddenly, he noticed something else

which did arouse his interest. Beyond the tree was a little dab of gray in the clear sky. He thought it a tiny cloud, but it dissolved even as he watched it. Immediately another appeared a short distance from where it had been and likewise dissolved. Then another.

"Those aren't clouds," said Westy. "They're—I bet it's a train."

He listened, but could hear nothing. But a little farther along, in line where the little dabs of white had appeared and disappeared, there straggled up a faint, half-tangible area of flaky whiteness which was gone instantly it was discernible.

"It's a train all right," Westy said, delighted. "I bet—I know it is."

Beyond the point where he had been looking, the rugged landscape rolled away, magnificent, majestic, endless. Here and there among the crowded mountains some mighty peak pierced the sky. No touch of human contamination was there, no gray streak imaginable as a road, no steeple, no green area of farm-land, with thin lines scarce discernible as fences. So it might have been a hundred thousand years ago. If man were there with all his claptrap he was swallowed up in the distance and vastness

and all unseen by the scratched and tattered boy who stood barefooted in his wild refuge and gazed and gazed.

It was only scenery that he saw, and it would have been about the same had he glanced in another direction. Only the little, gray, dissolving specks had drawn his gaze there, and he looked long and wonderingly on the stupendous glory that was spread before him. He knew not what it was, in particular, that he was looking at.

Thus, Westy Martin, award boy, saw the Yellowstone National Park for the first time. Saw it as a scout should see it, divested by the kindly distance of every vestige of human handiwork or presence that it has. Saw it in all its awesome grandeur, and saw not its boundaries or its artificial comforts, only its primeval magnificence extending mile upon mile and not distinguishable from the vast, mountainous country in which it lies.

Westy did not know that the area he was gazing at was within the boundaries of Yellowstone Park. His interest was centered in the little flickers of smoke that he had seen. If these indicated the railroad it would not be difficult to reach it, and from

there on the way would be easy and perhaps short. For the hundredth time since he had become its custodian, he felt in his pocket to make sure the wallet was safe.

Then for a few moments he thought, standing there alone. He had always liked, at times, to be alone; he was that kind of a boy. But now he could not bring himself to end this romantic, musing loneliness. Well, fate had been kind to him (he gave all the credit to fate) and he had done something, something worth while. To be sure, there was nothing so very primitive about it, he mused. Shining Sun doubtless could have made Nature yield him up a hundred various delectables out of which to make a feast. Poor Westy knew nothing about herbs and edible roots nor other commissary stores which the forest holds for those who know her secrets.

Again, he felt his pocket to make sure the wallet was safe. "I—I bet Shining Sun never even saw a wallet," he said. "I bet he doesn't even know how valuable money is." Poor Westy, he could not hope to be a scout, free of all the prosaic contaminations of civilization, like Shining Sun. But at

least no one could say now that he and his friends were just parlor scouts playing games in a back-yard. . . .

He lingered just a moment more, gazing upon the vast, rugged panorama as if it were *his*, something he had won. Then he looked, not ruefully but with a thrill of pride, on his scratches and tattered raiment. Well, at least he could look Shining Sun in the face, and Mr. Madison C. Wilde, too, if he should ever encounter that jarring personage again.

Then he went over and aroused his friends. If the money in the wallet had been his, he would have given it for a cup of hot coffee. "Come on, get up," he said; "we'll have to catch some more fish if we can, but anyway, I think we'll get there this morning; I think I know where the railroad tracks are. Have—I hope—have you got any matches left, Ed?"

"Absolooooootly," said Ed, sitting up refreshed and cheery as always. "And my trusty safety-pin is always at your service, Scout Martin. Where do we go from here?"

CHAPTER XXVI

MOVIE STUFF

THE spacious lobby of the Mammoth Hotel near the Gardiner entrance of Yellowstone Park was the scene of an amusing spectacle. Tourists, resting in comfortable chairs in the big, sunny, white-trimmed room, found a kind of restful diversion in the demeanor of a little man who strode back and forth like a lion in its cage, occasionally pausing before the clerk's counter to relieve himself of some pithy and vigorous comment. Away he would stride again in his strenuous roaming, now and again tacking so as to come within speaking range of a portly, elderly man, who sat with an air of grim resignation in a large rocking-chair. Here he would deliver himself of confidential observations relating to their joint interests and perplexities.

The little man had a bristly mustache which contributed to his pugnacious aspect, and his derby hat was cocked on the back of his head in a way which

seemed to indicate trouble and preoccupation. His unlighted cigar, too, contributed to this effect; it seemed more a weapon than a solace sticking upward at a rakish angle out of the corner of his mouth like a miniature cannon. He seemed altogether out of place among the scattering of carefree sightseers, who rocked at ease or read magazines or addressed postcards by the thousand.

"I don't suppose they'd pay any attention to a wire," he observed in sudden inspiration as he paused, in his ruminating course at the clerk's counter.

"Did you speak to the park superintendent?" one of the clerks casually asked.

"I spoke to forty-'leven superintendents," the little man shot back as he moved away on his circling orbit. Then, as a sort of gesture of belligerence, he looked at his watch. "I've talked to everybody except the wild animals themselves," he added, addressing nobody in particular. Then, reaching his grimly silent colleague, he planted himself before him, legs outstretched, a very picture of nonchalant annoyance and impatience.

"Well, there's nothing to do but wait for a duplicate permit, I suppose," he said. "If the grizzlies

and all the other savage junk up on Mount what-d'you-call-it are as slow and clumsy as the government, we ought to be able to pose them for photos. Can you beat it? Allen says they can't countersign an affidavit here, so there you are. You wiring for coin?"

"Oh, yes, that's not what's worrying me," said the elderly man.

"What do you think about Glittering Mud? Can you beat that kid? That manager of his, Black Hawk, ought to be in Wall Street! He'd have Morgan and Rockefeller and that bunch racing for the poorhouse. Well," he added, subsiding somewhat and seating himself beside his colleague, "we'll just have to sit and look at Old Faithful for a couple of weeks, I suppose."

"You saw the superintendent of the whole shebang?"

"He's away."

"Huh. Well, we don't want to get into any trouble with the government. Best thing is just to wait for a new permit, I suppose."

"'Tisn't the best thing, it's the only thing," said the little man.

"I wish you'd had Billy along," said the elder

man; "he could have shot the hold-up; it would have been good stuff."

"Yes, it *would* have been good stuff," agreed the little man; "good Wild West stuff. That Bulldog—what did the conductor call him?"

"Bloodhound Pete," said the elder man.

"He was a regular feller," said the little man, lifting one knee over the other and smiling in a way of pleasant reminiscence; "yes, he was the real thing; he had eyes like Bill Hart's. The conductor told me afterwards that every blamed detective Uncle Sam has has been after that gent for three years—never even got a squint at him. Nobody ever saw him except passengers and express messengers and mail car clerks. He's an artist. Conductor told me he doesn't make any tracks—*nothing*—just disappears. Once a pal squealed on him and then they thought they had him. But the pal was found shot—no tracks as usual. The man's an artist, one of the good old Jesse James school. Regular Robin Hood! Fairbanks ought to do that guy."

"Well, he's set us back a couple of weeks I suppose," said the elder man, "and a thousand dollars."

"It's the couple of weeks I'm thinking of," said

the other. "I'd give another thousand to get down to business."

His mood of impatience and annoyance seemed to return, and he allowed himself to slide down in his chair so far that the chair-back pushed against the brim of his hat and tilted it forward at an angle which somehow suggested the last extremity of disgust and perplexity.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ADVANCE GUARD

It is not necessary to tell you that this greatly harassed little man was none other than our traveling acquaintance, Mr. Madison C. Wilde, who had cast such a gloomy shadow in the young life of Westy Martin. He had emerged from one of the most harrowing experiences a traveler may have, without discredit to his pluck, but with a very heavy strain upon his temper.

His cigar, which was a sort of barometer of his mood, stood in an almost vertical position as he sat upon his back in the chair, his face (what could be seen of it under his tilted hat) lost in a brown study. His companion was Mr. Alexander Creston, owner of EDUCATIONAL FILMS. WILD LIFE AS IT IS, UPON THE SCREEN.

Mr. Wilde attracted a good deal of attention for two reasons, and several boys among the resting tourists hovered as near as they dared and gazed at

him. For one thing, he was connected with the movies. Also he was the victim of a daring hold-up, had been face to face with a desperate character, a man crowned with a halo of mystery, a famed outlaw whom no awestruck boy had ever seen. These boys could not see this fabled terror, so they stood about gazing at the man who had been one of his victims. Mr. Wilde shone by the reflected light of Bloodhound Pete.

The other victims of the hold-up had gone upon their sightseeing tours very much shaken by their experience of the previous morning. Of all that hapless company only Mr. Wilde remained, stranded in the Mammoth Hotel at Mammoth Hot Springs, with nothing to do but wait for the machinery at Washington to grind him out another permit. Mr. Creston, who likewise waited, had wired for money to replace the very considerable sum which the bandits had taken. Billy, the camera man, who with Mr. Creston had awaited the arrival of Mr. Wilde, also rested at the Mammoth Hotel in enforced idleness.

To have encountered Bloodhound Pete, the mysterious, unseen terror of Wyoming, conferred a certain prestige even upon his victim. And so the

boys who happened to be about gazed in awe at the figure of Mr. Wilde whose posture, eloquent of pre-occupation and annoyance, discouraged them from questioning him.

But one likely looking boy in natty scout attire, whose mother was conducting a masterly post card assault against her distant friends, ventured to address the harassed and forbidding personage who had been vouchsafed the glory of seeing the modern Robin Hood.

"If there's anything I can do for you, I'll be glad to do it," the boy said. It required some temerity to say even that much. "If you want me to go to the superintendent's office or something?"

This altogether scoutish proffer of service caught Mr. Wilde in a mood not calculated to receive it kindly. No doubt his vexation was natural. At first he did not answer at all, then, looking at the Boy Scout in a way of surly half-interest, he said in a tone quite unworthy of his usual bantering cordiality.

"No, sir, *absolutely nothing*. There's nothing that any of you kids can do for me. So you might as well all chase out of here and see the park instead of standing around gaping. Come on, beat it now!"

The group scattered.

"Kids around here are a blamed nuisance," Mr. Wilde observed to his companion.

"I wish we could find a nice, likely youngster to take up yonder," said Mr. Creston.

"Huh—yes—I should think," muttered Mr. Wilde. "And who'd go along as nurse girl?"

"I'd go along as nurse girl," said a cheery voice.

Mr. Wilde looked up and beheld the funny, smiling countenance of Ed Carlyle.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE GARB OF THE SCOUT

MR. WILDE stared. The loitering boys stared. Everybody stared. And well they might, for the figure they gazed upon was bizarre to the last degree. Around Ed's waist was drawn a sweater like a romantic Spanish sash, while sticking ostentatiously in the shoulder of his shirt was a safety-pin, disqualified for its conventional use by much twisting and bending.

But the onlookers had not long to stare. The sound of loud talking outside caused a general rush of the younger element to the great veranda, while their less curious elders looked from doors and windows and wondered.

Approaching along one of the walks that bisect the spacious lawn in front of the big hotel was a strange sight. A boy in tattered khaki was approaching, hatless and barefooted, surrounded and followed by a questioning, gaping, shouting, clamor-

ous throng. With him was another khaki-clad boy who was laughing at the excitement they were causing and answering the queries of their astonished escort.

It was no wonder that the boys gazed spellbound at the ragged apparition, nor that the park employees and tourists paused to stare. His trousers were all but in shreds, and not a button remained upon his mud-bespattered and torn shirt which lay open exposing his scratched chest. His hair was disheveled, one rebellious lock depending over his forehead. With one hand he kept continually pushing this back and sometimes effected the same result with a fine toss of his head, which somehow rounded out his picturesque, vagabond aspect. His other hand was firmly buried in his trousers pocket, which bulged with the pressure of something large and flat. It was noticeable that he kept his hand there.

But it was not the name of Westy Martin that brought every last person out of the hotel, watching eagerly the excited little group. Rather was it the awful name of Bloodhound Pete shouted by an exuberant follower of the award boys.

"He got it from Bloodhound Pete! He got it from Bloodhound Pete!"

"Let's see it!"

"Yes, you did—not!"

"Give us a look!"

"Sèeing is believing!"

"Where did he?"

"When?"

"How?"

"Who says he did?"

"*This feller did—alone? Yaaah!*"

"What do you take us for?" one breathless skeptic demanded of Warde.

And so, shouting, clamoring, denying, scoffing, questioning and crowding about him and talking all at the same time, the crowd constituted itself a vociferous escort to Westy as he passed along the walk and up the big veranda and into the spacious, airy lobby of the Mammoth Hotel.

He had expected to keep his promise to his poor, fond mother and "wash his hands and face and brush his clothes before leaving the train," and a few minutes later descend, bag and baggage, from an auto before the portal of his first stopping place in the park. "When you enter a hotel," she had said, adjusting his collar, "you want to have your hair brushed and look like a gentleman."

"Is Mr. Madison C. Wilde here?" Warde asked.

"The movie man?"

"Sure he is, he's in the smoking room."

"No, he isn't, he's in the lobby—he's mad."

"Come on, I'll show you where he is, he chased us."

Before Mr. Wilde had recovered from the sight of Ed Carlyle, Westy stood before him, conspicuous in the clustering, vociferous throng, a fine picture of rags and tatters. Warde, standing close to him, had forcibly loosened his comrade's rolled-up sleeve so that on the loose hanging khaki the stalker's badge and the pathfinder's badge were exposed. Westy's other arm, with a long scratch on it where he had let it slide against the bark of the big elm, was at his side, hand in pocket, clutching the treasure that was there.

Not so much as one vestige remained about Westy of the trim boy scout whom Mr. Wilde had "jollied" on the train; only his two badges exposed by his patrol mate and rendered clearer to view by Ed Carlyle as he smoothed down his companion's wrinkled sleeve.

"Mr. Wilde," said Westy, pulling his scarred arm out of his pocket, "here's your wallet; it's got

your money and your permit all safe. I took it away from Bloodhound Pete and—and——”

“The pleasure is entirely ours,” Ed Carlyle concluded for him.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE POLISH OF SHINING SUN

WESTY told his story simply, modestly, while a swelling crowd clustered about. It seemed that he and his comrades had not been missed from the train during the short run after they had been left behind. Doubtless the excitement caused by the train robbery had sufficiently extinguished any curiosity among their chance acquaintance en route. Indeed, Mr. Wilde very frankly observed, "You kids were the least of my troubles; I was thinking of my wallet. I was trying to write out some descriptive stuff about wild animals and hoping you wouldn't come back again when the train stopped and a woman screamed and the next thing I knew I was handing my writing tablet to Bill Hart and telling another woman to shut up. Never gave you kids another thought."

Westy and his comrades were greatly relieved to learn that no word of their non-appearance

had been wired to Bridgeboro. It is true that they had only just escaped with their little adventure and saved themselves from prosaic complications, for the gentleman who was to have received them at Gardiner had been in communication with Livingston and had engineered the dispatch of an auto over the road to pick them up. But fate was kind to them and somehow they had not encountered the rescue car, which (to make matters worse) was a Ford sedan.

So it befell that the three award boys, in despite of all modern claptrap, crossed the boundary of Yellowstone National Park as some scout or trapper of old might have crossed it, having safely eluded two western desperadoes and a Ford sedan. But it was a narrow escape.

"Could we see Shining Sun? Is he here?" Westy asked almost in a reverend whisper.

"All is over between Stove Polish and myself," said Mr. Wilde. "Never mention his name again. That canny, little red-face wanted five hundred dollars down before leaving this hotel, and his manager, Pink Vulture or Black Hawk or whatever he calls himself, insists on the kid being featured in all the exploitation stuff. *N-o-t-h-i-n-g* doing, I told

him! That ain't the way we put over Educational Films. *Lo, the poor Indian*—bunk. Why, Stove Polish is starting his own outfit in Hollywood next year. What d'yer know about that? Don't talk to me about that Cheyenne! It's good he wasn't around when the Yankees bought Cape Cod for a couple of spark plugs or something or other."

Westy gasped.

"As a pathfinder that kid is O.K.," said Mr. Wilde. "He can track a dollar to its silent lair. *N-o-t-h-i-n-g* doing, I told him! If you want to meet him, there he is in the next room or somewhere or other. Keep your hands on your watches."

Dumbfounded at this hearty tirade, the three boys, followed by an admiring throng of other boys, explored the public places of the big hotel. They penetrated the dining room and glanced about curiously. They peered into the remotest fastnesses opening from corridors and stole into all the carpeted nooks and crannies where they thought a Cheyenne Indian might lurk. Mr. Wilde had declined to hit the trail with them.

"I'll show him to you," said an accommodating youngster who clung to Westy; "I know him; I'll

find him for you. Mr. Creston was bawling him out; oh, boy, you ought to have heard him."

So it was that Westy's cup of joy was full and he found himself hunting Indians like the gallant Custer or like Buffalo Bill. And, at last, they brought poor Westy's hero to bay in one of the parlors. He sat in a rocker, talking with his manager, Mr. Hawk, Black Hawk of the Rockies—and Hollywood.

Poor Westy, he could only gaze speechless. More atrocious than all the atrocities committed by the movies was Shining Sun, the Indian boy. He was ravishing in his sartorial splendor, wearing a red-ribboned straw hat and spats! *And he carried a cane*—young boy though he was. Oh, shades of Pontiac and Sitting Bull! He carried a cane! Wesley Barryized, Jackie Cooganized, movieized, he sat there talking to Mr. Hawk about the disagreement they had had with *Educational Films*. And if old Massasoit did not turn in his grave it must have been because he was too shocked or grieved to stir!

Westy gazed at this sophisticated youngster in chilled disillusionment. Shining Sun had indeed been shining while he, the parlor woodsman, the

back-yard scout, had been getting away from the most notorious bandit west of the Mississippi. If Westy had beheld Bloodhound Pete in a dress suit and stove-pipe hat he could hardly have received a greater shock. That the Indian boy had real skill and woods lore did not save him in the eyes of this sturdy little hero of the Silver Fox Patrol, who had found money the only false note in his memorable adventure.

"Come on away," Warde whispered, "he's talking business. Shh! Don't you know he's the Cheyenne Valentino?"

"He ought to be stabbed to the heart with my safety-pin," said Ed. "If I ever meet him in a lonely spot on Broadway some dark night, I'll lasso him with worsted from my sweater. Come on, let's get away from here. I'm sorry for you, West, you old tramp; I'm for the Boy Scouts of America. I'd rather live on fish and wear honest rags."

"You tell 'em," said Warde, earnestly.

He put his arm over his patrol mate's shoulder as if to claim a kinship of which even Ed could not boast. But it made no difference to Ed, for a scout is a brother to every other scout throughout the whole length and breadth of the land. Westy

seemed conscious of this as he rapped Ed on the shoulder while the three strolled away together.

"Well, are you cured?" Warde asked.

"Yes, I'm cured," said Westy.

"You admit you're a scout?" queried Ed.

"I admit *you're* one," Westy said.

"Thanks for those kind words."

"You always smile and look pleasant and that's the main thing," said Westy.

"Wrong the first time," said Ed. "The main thing is not to accept anything for a service; law five, also law nine; handbook page thirty-four."

"You said it," enthused Warde. "The trouble with——"

"Tarnished Sun," interrupted Ed.

"The trouble with him," said Warde, "he's been commercialized."

"Repeat that word," said Ed.

"Commercialized," said Warde.

"Go to the head of the class and take a slap on the wrist," said Ed.

"It means kind of spoiled by money and being famous and all that," said Warde.

"I'll take your word for it," said Ed. "It's a mighty nice word, I'll say that."

"There are people trying to commercialize boy scouts, too," said Warde.

"Not if we see 'em first," said Westy.

"If we get killed, we'll get killed for love," said Ed. "We won't take any money for it—not even a tip."

"Let's all make a solemn vow that we won't carry canes," said Warde.

"I'm with you," said Ed. "Or wear spats."

"Right," said Warde.

"I've got to get some clothes somewhere," said Westy.

"I think there's a clothing store at the bottom of the canyon," Warde observed.

"First I'd like to go to the Devil's Kitchen and get something to eat," said Ed.

"Don't you want to see the petrified forest?" Westy asked.

"Not unless I can eat it," said Ed. "Just at present I don't want to see anything I can't eat—except fish. If anybody mentions fish to me, I'll stab him with my safety-pin. I wouldn't even listen to a fish story."

"I bet Mr. Creston and Mr. Wilde had an awful scrap with Tarnished Sun," said Warde.

"I bet Shining Sun hit him with his cane," said Ed. "If he did, I hope Mr. Wilde just puffed cigar smoke in his face; it would serve him right."

"Do you smell roast beef?" said Warde.

"*Boy*, that smells good," said Westy.

"I think we're on the right trail," said Ed.

CHAPTER XXX

VISITORS

As Westy went about the hotel in his tattered attire and thought of Shining Sun, the Indian boy, unnoticed and occupied with his business quarrel, it seemed to him that the world was upside down.

Wherever the award boy went, people looked at him, and as for boys, of whom there were many about the place, they followed him around, besetting him again and again for details of his adventure. Some of the more shy ones contemplated him with a kind of awe as if he had come from Mars, asking questions about Bloodhound Pete which, of course, Westy could not answer.

He found himself a real hero, with no essential of that thrilling rôle lacking. Gentlemen patted him on the shoulder, telling him that he was "*some boy*," and one girl begged that before he changed a *single stitch* of his *perfectly adorable* attire, he let her take him with her kodak. In the dining room all faces

were directed to the table where the three award boys ate. And indeed it was worth while watching them eat, for, as Ed observed, "nobody ever ate like this before."

"The tables are turned, that's sure," said Warde.

"Maybe we can continue at another table," said Ed.

"I mean Westy's the real scout after all," said Warde.

"My error, I was thinking of dining tables," said Ed. "I can't seem to think of anything else. That girl over at the third table, Wes, the one that's eating a cruller; she's the one that took your picture, isn't she? I want to collect a dollar and a half from her as your manager."

"She ought to take *your* picture in that crazy sweater," Westy said.

"That will cost her fifty cents and the war tax," said Ed. "That sweater saved your life, young Scratch-on-the-arm, full-blooded New Jersey Boy Scout. That's a good name, hey, Warde?"

"Yes, and you ought to be called Red Sweater or Bent Safety-pin," laughed Warde.

"And you ought to be called Warde's Cake," said Ed. "You seem to have the plate all to yourself."

"I can't stop eating while people are watching me," said Warde.

"Let them look," said Ed, "it's no disgrace to eat. Pass the pickles will you, Scratch-on-the-arm? When are we going to start seeing the Park, anyway?"

"To-morrow morning," said Westy.

"We're going to see Cleopatra's Terrace," said Warde.

"I don't want to go where she is," said Ed. "I had her in the fourth grade; she and I don't speak."

"There are a lot of terraces," said Westy.

"If they want to bring them in, I'll look at them," said Warde. "The rest of to-day I'm going to rest."

"And I've got to get hold of my baggage," said Westy.

"Maybe you could borrow a cutaway suit from Tarnished Sun," said Ed. "I'd like to see the Devil's Kitchen to-day anyway; I never knew he could cook."

"I've tasted some things I think he must have cooked," said Warde.

"We have to see Orange Spring, too, while we're here," said Westy.

"I heard that was a lemon," said Ed.

"There's one spring I would like to visit," said Warde.

"The bed spring," said Ed. "Right the first time. Let's all visit the wonderful bed springs and drop in on Satan for breakfast."

"Already you're thinking about breakfast," said Westy.

"Sure, I am," said Ed. "In about an hour I'll be asleep and I can't think of it then, can I? I'm good and tired if anybody should ask you."

"They don't have to ask, they can see it," said Warde.

But it befell that the three boys had something else to think about when they adjourned to the spacious, spotless room that had been reserved for them. For scarcely had they entered it when in came Mr. Willison, the gentleman connected with one of the camps who had assumed the responsibility of receiving the trio and "having an eye to them," as he had said, during their sojourn in the Park. He was active in scouting and an enthusiastic Rotarian.

A fine, genial man he was, who caught the boys' mood of raillery toward the natural wonders they

were to see and was not at all inclined to line up the customary "sights" before them like a school lesson. With him was Mr. Wilde, hat on back of head, hands thrust down in trousers pockets, whimsical, efficient, sophisticated. He seemed buried in a kind of worldly, practical rumination.

"Well, how are the back-yard scouts?" he asked, with a kind of surly cordiality, as he seated himself on the edge of one of the beds. "You went and did it, didn't you?" he added, turning to Westy. "You satisfied?"

"Are *you* satisfied?" Westy asked.

Mr. Wilde scrutinized him shrewdly. "Uh huh," he finally said.

"Then *I'm* satisfied," said Westy.

Mr. Wilde glanced sideways with a skeptical, knowing look at Mr. Willison. That gentleman exhibited an air of silent confidence. An acute observer might have surmised that he and the thoroughly worldly Mr. Wilde had some sort of bet pending. It was not in Mr. Wilde's nature to deal in compliments, but no one could have failed to interpret his sagacious, approving, amused look at the boy who stood, ill at ease, leaning against the dresser.

"So you're satisfied, huh? I suppose you think you're a regular feller now—regular scout!"

"I think I'm pretty tired," said Westy.

"You going to send an account of it to the Boy Scout Magazine?"

"No, I'm not."

"No?"

There followed a pause. Then Mr. Wilde very deliberately pulled out the memorable wallet, placed it flat on his lap and laid it open.

"Was everything all right—all there?" Warde asked.

No answer. Westy leaned against the dresser, kicking one foot nervously. Somewhere within easy hearing an orchestra was playing the *Three O'Clock in the Morning Waltz*. It seemed odd to be hearing this in the wilds of the Rocky Mountains. Westy could hear the sound of dancing. He felt tenderly of the long scratch on his bare leg. He dropped the towel which lay over his shoulder. Ed Carlyle sat up on top of the high dresser, his legs dangling. Warde, sitting on the edge of another bed, kept time with the plaintive music, drumming with his fingers.

Oddly enough, Westy felt almost as nervous and

apprehensive as when he had let himself silently down out of the big elm. No one spoke. Every one seemed to be waiting.

And Mr. Wilde was distressingly slow and deliberate.

CHAPTER XXXI

NO ESCAPE

At length Mr. Wilde spoke. "Mr. Creston thinks that you kids should be suitably rewarded. Do you want to fix a price or do you want to leave it to me? You did a big thing—he thinks we ought to consider the three of you as one."

"That suits me all right," said Ed, swinging his legs; "then any one of us can answer for the whole three. What is it? I'll answer."

"Righto," said Warde.

"I was thinking," said Mr. Wilde, "that two hundred and fifty dollars——"

Then Westy spoke up, kicking his foot nervously and gulping, while tears appeared in his sober, clear eyes.

"If—if you're going to talk about money," he said, "I'd—I wish you'd let me go out of the room first. The Rotary Club, they didn't give us money; they sent us out here. Any—any fun that we have

out here it's on them—it is—it's on those men that sent us. Now—now you'll—you're trying to spoil it all for us—that's what you're doing. Just when we're going to turn in because we're good and tired, you come up here and try to spoil everything for us—you do! Just when everything's going all right—now you—you have to—if you're going to talk about money, I want to go out of the room—why can't you let us—just be scouts—even if we're not really—if you're going to start about rewards I don't want to stay here! Just because I'm an award fellow you needn't think that means the same as *reward*, because it doesn't!"

Mr. Madison C. Wilde methodically folded his wallet, placed it in his pocket, and was on his feet quick enough to get between Westy and the door. There he held him fixed, a hand on either of the boy's sore shoulders. "You didn't get away that time, did you?" he said. "You're not stealing a march on Bloodhound Pete now, you're dealing with M. C. Wilde, *Educational Films, Savage Life for Each and All*. You said something about good turns on the train. I don't know whether you meant it, you talked a heap of nonsense. But if you did, now's the time to prove it. Will you help us out

up in the woods or not—you and your side partners? You talked about good turns and not taking rewards, now, by golly, I'll call your bluff! Will you hit the trail for Pelican Cone after grizzlies and things—or no? There's not a cent in it! What do you say?"

"Mr. Willison——" began Westy, utterly flabbergasted.

"You leave Mr. Willison to me," said Mr. Wilde. "I'll take care of him all right! Didn't I take care of Stove Polish, all right? He went way back and sat down when *I* got through with him. Now how long is it going to take these kids to see the spouting forests and the petrified geysers and things?"

"About four days," laughed Mr. Willison.

"All right," said Mr. Wilde, "get busy and make it snappy. Billy and I want to hit the trail in four or five days. Go on to bed now, you kids; Mr. Willison and I will plan things out for you. Don't be scared if you hear the bears roaring in the night."

"Who's Billy?" Warde asked.

"He's camera man," said Mr. Wilde.

As the men opened the door to depart, the strains of dance music could be heard louder in the big hall below. Weary as he was, Westy lay awake

after his companions (a hopeless pair in the matter of slumber) were dead to the world. And when he did fall asleep he dreamed that he was doing a toe dance on the very apex of Pelican Cone, when suddenly a grizzly bear approached and asked him to dance the *Three O'Clock in the Morning Waltz*. He accepted the invitation and fell off the mountain into the Devil's Kitchen, where they were serving sandwiches and chicken salad in the intervals of the dancing.

CHAPTER XXXII

OFF TO PELICAN CONE

So it happened that Westy Martin, who had called himself and his companions back-yard scouts, was now afforded the opportunity to do something really big in the line of scouting. Little he dreamed how very big that something would be.

We need not pause to accompany our three heroes on these tours of the Park. They saw the sights in true tourist fashion. They saw Old Faithful geyser, they went down into the Devil's Kitchen, they gazed at the petrified forests—and thought of Pelican Cone. Where was Pelican Cone? Somewhere away off the main traveled roads, no doubt. They asked fellow tourists about it, but none had ever heard of it. And the more remote and inaccessible and unknown it seemed to be, the more they longed to penetrate its distant and intricate fastnesses.

At last, at the appointed time, Westy waited in the big office of the Mammoth Hotel near the

Gardiner entrance of the Park. A little group of envious boys, belonging to tourist parties, stood about curiously and enviously.

"Aren't the other two fellows going?" one asked.

"Sure, they're getting ready," said Westy.

"Gee whiz, I'd like to be going up there," said another. "I bet it's wild, hey?"

"I guess it is. I've never been up there," said Westy.

The envious little audience stood about gazing at Westy while he waited for his two companions and for Mr. Wilde and Billy the camera man. Westy, bag and baggage, had appeared in the office a half hour before the appointed time; he was not going to take any chances of missing his new friends! He had awakened at daylight and lay counting the minutes. At six o'clock he had arisen, eaten breakfast alone, then wandered about, waiting.

When finally he took his stand in the big office of the hotel he found himself quite as much a celebrity as that fallen hero Shining Sun had ever been.

At last his four comrades on the big adventure appeared together, having partaken of a hasty breakfast.

Mr. Wilde had rooted out the two sleepers whose rest had not been disturbed by thoughts of the big trip.

"A hopeless pair," said Mr. Wilde cheerily. "Are you all ready?"

"Where's your scout suit?" Westy asked Ed Carlyle.

"He was too sleepy to see what he was putting on," said Mr. Wilde in his brisk way. "It's not the clothes that make the scout—how 'bout that, Ed? Westy, my boy, you're all for show."

"No, but I don't see why he didn't wear his khaki suit as long as he's got one," said Westy. "*You've* got a khaki suit on, I see."

"Meet Billy, the camera man," said Mr. Wilde. "Billy, now you see the whole outfit, Westy, Ed, and Warde. They've got last names, but we're not going to bother carrying them when mountain hiking. You don't want any more weight and paraphernalia than necessary. Ed is such a fine scout he doesn't require any significant equipment—like you. You fellows with all your scout trappings belong in the Shining Sun class. That right, Ed?"

It was impossible to debate such a matter with

Mr. Wilde. There was a certain finality to everything he said. And his buoyant air of banter quite silenced poor Westy. But the boy did wonder, he could not help wondering, why Ed Carlyle, in this great scout adventure of their young lives, should have failed to don his regular scouting apparel.

"Trouble with you," said Mr. Wilde, patting Westy on the shoulder, "you're all for fuss and feathers. You want to tell the world you're a scout instead of proving it. You and Warde are all dolled up like Christmas trees—parlor scouts. Am I right, Billy? Now, are you all ready or do you want to go upstairs and brush your hair? All right then, let's go. We seem to be creating quite a disturbance here. If we don't beat it we'll have Old Faithful Geyser, the Petrified Forests, and the Devil's Kitchenette tearing their hair with jealousy."

An automobile was waiting outside the hotel to take the party as far as Yellowstone Falls beyond which point there was no regular road to their remote and lonely destination. It was a ride of about twenty-five miles down around Norris Geyser Basin and eastward to the vicinity of the Grand Canyon. The award boys had seen this in all its colorful

glory only two days before, and had descended into its depths. Eastward from this point was a tract of wild Rocky Mountain country where no tourists ever went and rising out of this rugged region some twelve or fifteen miles distant was Pelican Cone rearing its head nine thousand five hundred feet above the surrounding country.

There was a trail to the mountain, a trail which could have told many thrilling tales if it could have spoken to the passerby. Along its winding way famous scouts of old had passed in their quest of grizzlies, and the solemn depths of the neighboring forests had once resounded with the appalling war-cry of the Indians.

It was with a thrill of high anticipation that Westy Martin, taking a last look at the frontier of tourist travel (wild enough indeed), turned his gaze toward the forbidding and unpeopled region which they were about to enter. As he did so the familiar honk of the automobiles which had brought them to the stepping-off place could be heard as the car sped northward along the road toward Tower Falls.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HERMITAGE REST

FOR three hours they tramped along this obscure trail which ran through such wildness as our scouts had never seen before. Then suddenly and to their great surprise they came upon quite a sizable permanent camp. It was on the lower reaches of the mountain and was called Hermitage Rest, a very good name for it, considering its remoteness and isolation. It was conducted by an old Rocky Mountain guide named Buck Whitley, and was the refuge of a dozen or more tired business men who found relaxation in the soothing companionship and hospitality of their host, who boasted that he had never seen a locomotive!

Buck Whitley was a true Rocky Mountain character, a holdover from the good old school of Kit Carson with whom he had many times been on the trail. The camp consisted of some twenty rough cabins, and the pastime of the guests was mostly

fishing. The only jarring note in this primitive outfit was a telephone carried from the main line at the Hotel on Yellowstone Lake. This was the only suggestion of civilization. It was Buck Whitley's only concession to his tired business men and he professed not only ignorance but scorn of the talk which went over the wire.

Our travelers paused at this romantic and sequestered spot for lunch and ate such trout as there is no word in the English language to describe. It was from old Buck Whitley that Mr. Wilde derived some information about the neighboring mountain which, evidently, he had not been able to derive at Mammoth Hot Springs. The boys listened intently and with mounting expectancy to the talk between the old scout and Mr. Wilde and Billy, the camera man. This talk involved a series of considerations from which our young heroes seemed to be excluded. It was Mr. Wilde's way to amuse himself with the three scouts, to jolly them, but he had not made them cognizant of his plans in detail.

Their first real knowledge of the business in hand was now gleaned in this indirect fashion, and they were appalled at the hazardous nature of the work to be undertaken.

"Yer got ter go over ter east cliff fer vultures," said Old Buck in answer to Mr. Wilde's question. "Jes' foller the trail up around ter the north, then around ag'in ter the sout'east, 'en that'll fetch yer right along the edge of it—Vulture's Cliff, they calls it."

"Nests out along there, I suppose?" Mr. Wilde queried.

"Sech as they is," said the old scout. "Yer'll see a clump o' sticks, looks somethin' like a bush, them's the way they looks. Yer got ter look sharp if yer go near 'em."

"Sweep you right off the ledge, huh?" said Mr. Wilde. Evidently he knew something about these matters.

It seemed to Westy that he had been investigating the habit of vultures. Westy's thoughts had dwelt mostly on the subject of grizzlies. It was now becoming momentarily evident that Mr. Wilde had a particular enterprise in hand, that for some reason or other he wished to cast one or more of these horrible birds in a startling rôle. He screwed his cigar over to the opposite corner of his mouth and listened attentively while Old Buck Whitley narrated a ghastly episode which he had once be-

held with his own eyes. The three scouts listened spellbound. The reminiscence involved the fate of a man who many years before had ventured out on Vulture Cliff and had actually been driven out to the very edge of the dizzy precipice, outmaneuvered by one of those great birds which he had vainly tried to dodge, and pushed over the edge by a sudden skillful swoop of that monster of the air.

"Jimmie couldn't even get his hands on him," said the old guide, "and he couldn' dodge 'im neither—no, sir. The bird kept in back of him, keepin' Jimmie between him and the edge, swoopen against him and drivin' him nearer and nearer till he took a big swoop and came sweepin' down against him and over he went into the country down yonder. Yer can pick out odds and ends of bones, bleached white, down there now with a spyglass. The bird he went down and finished him like they do."

"I was wondering if they really do that," said Mr. Wilde, in a way of business interest. "I was reading about it, but you know these natural history books are cluttered up with all sorts of junk."

"'Tain't no junk," said Buck Whitley. "You folks take my advice and keep away from the edge."

Don't get so far out you can't ketch hold on a tree or somethin'. They'll back yer right off jes' like if they was dancin' with yer."

"Pretty neat, huh," said Mr. Wilde. "That's the kind of stuff we want. I'm going to get a shot at a scene like that if I can fix it. Novelty, huh?"

Westy, who had listened with rapt attention to this appalling narrative, thought that there might be two opinions about the meaning of the word *neat*. One thing seemed evident. Mr. Wilde had a rather more adventurous purpose in view than merely the photographing of wild life. He was after thrills. It seemed as if he had dug up somewhere references to the habit and diabolical skill of vultures in procuring the death of their victims.

Westy had read of mortal combats on the edge of precipitous heights. He had seen one man push another from a precipice in the movies. Also he had the usual indifferent knowledge about vultures. He knew that they were of great size and strength but were far from being heroic. He knew that they followed armies, and had an uncanny intuition in the matter of where the dead were to be found.

Now, from what he had heard, it appeared that

in the lonesome and craggy neighborhood of their nests these horrible creatures were wont to play more heroic rôles. That by skill and persistence they could make the dizzy precipice their confederate and compass the death of their baffled and outmaneuvered victims by precipitating them upon jagged rocks far below the scene of encounter.

"Then they wait a reasonable time," Mr. Wilde had said, "before descending to the feast."

To be involved in an affair of this kind seemed quite a different sort of matter than stalking grizzlies and mountain leopards. In such a predicament a man might be permitted to violate the good and stringent rule of the Park and shoot his fearful assailant. But surely he would have no right deliberately to place himself in a position where such means of defense would be necessary. Yet it was evidently Mr. Wilde's purpose to avail himself of this uncanny habit of the dreadful vulture to stage a scene which would furnish a real thrill to movie fans throughout the land.

How was he going to do this? And to what peril might he intend to subject these boys whom he had jollied and called parlor scouts?

CHAPTER XXXIV

VULTURE CLIFF

PERHAPS it was because these three good scouts were after all just boys that they began to be conscious of certain real or imagined perils in their big adventure. They talked over among themselves what they were likely to be expected to do and they began to be a little concerned about the secrecy which characterized the expedition. Westy had talked of doing something *big*, of being a scout in the large and adventurous sense. And he had felt quite ashamed of scouting as he knew it, when he allowed himself to view it through the sophisticated gaze of Mr. Wilde. He began to wonder now whether all his big talk, or rather the expression of his big hopes, was not going to plunge him and his companions into perils which he had not anticipated. Poor Westy, he was not afraid; he was only young and unseasoned. Mr. Wilde, on the other hand, was thoroughly seasoned—oh, very.

So thoroughly seasoned that he did not take these youngsters into his confidence. And thereby ensued something very like tragedy.

The trail up the mountain was through such a wilderness as the boys had never seen before. It was late in the evening when they came out into the open and beheld a panorama far below them and reaching eastward as far as the eye could see. Mountains, mountains, mountains, rolling one upon another in stately and magnificent profusion. So they might have been for thousands, millions, of years without so much as one contaminating sign of man and all his claptrap works.

How small, how insignificant, would even a city seem in that endless region of rock and hill. The vast scene was gray in the twilight, for even the sun was sinking to rest in the more hospitable direction whence they had come. They were facing the sunless chill of a Rocky Mountain evening, looking eastward toward the only compass point that was open to their view. They were almost at the edge of a mighty precipice, a stupendous gallery of nature. It was as if a mountain had been rent asunder and half of it taken away to afford a dizzy view of the amphitheater below.

As the party paused to make their camp within the shelter of the forest a few hundred feet from the brow of the precipice, Mr. Wilde, his unlighted cigar tilted like a flag-pole out of his mouth sauntered over toward the edge with Billy, the camera man, with the practical manner of a man who might intend to buy real estate in that forsaken region or who was picking out a suitable spot for a tennis court. The boys, useful at last, and competent in their task, began pitching their tent and making ready their little camp. They saw Mr. Wilde and the camera man approach a little clump of something dark within a very few feet of the precipice. It was bare and bleak out there, without background or vegetation, and the two khaki-clad figures seemed bereft of their individuality; they were just two dark objects examining another object on the naked, cheerless rock. High in the air above a black speck moved through the dusk and disappeared among the distant mountains.

"I don't see how they can get a picture of a thing like that," said Warde; "a vulture doing a thing like that, I mean. They wouldn't get a picture of me having a scrap with a vulture, not while I'm conscious."

"You wouldn't be conscious long," said Warde.

"The first thing they'll be able to get a picture of up here," said Ed Carlyle, "is me eating some fried bacon, only they'll have to be quick. Come on, let's get the fire started. Where's the can-opener, anyway? Chuck that egg powder over here, will you? I'm going to stage a scene with an omelet."

"I know one thing," said Warde, "we've been talking about something *big*. Whatever they want me to do I'm going to do it. I'm not going to flunk."

"Believe me, I'm going to do something big," said Ed. "Watch me! I'm going to do a bacon sandwich—a *big one*. Where's the thing to fry this on anyway? Let's have a big supper; big is my middle name. You fellows must be crazy! You don't suppose Mr. Wilde wants us to risk our young lives, do you? If I saw a vulture now I'd eat him before he had a chance to eat me, I'm so hungry. I wish there was some place around here where we could get an ice cream soda; I'm thirsty too."

"A raspberry sundae would go good," said Warde, as he gathered sticks for their fire. "I

remind myself of Pee-Wee Harris. They say vultures live to be a hundred years old."

"I bet there's plenty of them up here all right," said Westy. "We came to the right place."

"I don't see any now," said Ed. "I guess they all went to the movies, hey?"

"It would be mighty risky," said Westy, "staging a scene like that—a vulture trying to edge somebody off a cliff. I don't see how they could do it."

"Leave it to Mr. Wilde," said Warde.

"I'll be very glad to," said Ed in his funny way. "You'd think we were all dead ones talking about vultures. Come on, let's get ready to eat. If I had some eggs I'd cook some ham and eggs if I only had some ham. I wonder how cocoa would go in an omelet?"

"It'll all go," said Warde.

"Right the first time as you usually ain't," said Ed. "To-morrow we'll catch some trout, hey?"

Then raising his voice this exuberant member of the party called aloud, "Hey, Mr. Wilde and Billy, the camera man, come on home to supper! You've just got time to wash your face and hands!"

His voice sounded strange and singularly clear in the stillness and gathering dusk. The last word

or two reëchoed and sounded ghastly in the solemn and lonely twilight.

"Somebody hiding around here," said Ed, clapping his hand to his ear in a funny manner of affectation. "He's not going to get anything to eat anyway, that's one sure thing."

CHAPTER XXXV

DISAPPOINTMENT

AFTER a hearty camp supper, devoured with appetites whetted by the keen mountain air, the boys found themselves only too glad to roll in for a good night's sleep. "Have the bell-boy call me in the morning," called Ed airily from his blanket, but before either the drowsy Warde or tired Westy could come back at him with a reply, sleep overpowered all three. They only waked next morning when the brisk stirring about of Mr. Wilde and Billy disturbed them.

"Come on now, you fellows," jeered Mr. Wilde. "Scouts ought to be up and dressed ahead of an old business man like me."

Warde and Westy took this remark to heart and scrambled shamefacedly for their clothes, but Ed's unfailing good humor left him untouched. He lolled back, gazing up and up into the depths of foliage above him and retorted, "Have that bell-

hop get my pants from the tailor." "Aren't you going to wear your scout suit at all?" queried Westy in disapproval.

"Aw, gee, Mr. Wilde joshed me so about wearing 'rompers' I'm going to stick to my corduroys," said Ed, springing up, his mind eagerly on breakfast.

"Are you going up to Vulture Cliff this morning, Mr. Wilde?" asked Warde, impatient to know the program of the outing.

"That's just where I'm going, Mister," replied Mr. Wilde, busy already with preparations for this hike. "And," he added, "I hope you young hopefuls put in a lucky day catching plenty of fish for a good meal this evening, because when Billy and I get back here we'll be hungry enough to eat a hard-boiled rhinoceros."

"Can't we go with you?" asked Westy, his face the picture of disappointment.

"Go with us, your grandmother," grinned Billy heartlessly. "That cliff is no place for little children."

"I should say not," added Mr. Wilde. "I can't be responsible to your mammas if their darling

boys fall down and have the buzzards pick their bones. Why, don't you know a vulture would rather eat a Boy Scout than a dish of ice cream? No, you kids stick around here out of our way where you're safe and show us what kind of a meal a star scout can cook."

It was a cruel disappointment to the boys to find that their part in this unique expedition was to be limited to the mere routine of camp duty. This was truly a blow to their expectations and pride, but each was too good a scout to argue or whine. They took this disappointment characteristically: Westy, the sensitive, was hurt. He felt that he had proved himself in the encounter with Bloodhound Pete and was entitled to be trusted in "big" things. He was too proud to say this, however, and only flushed and kept silent. Warde was plainly indignant. Ed, however, although quite as disappointed as the others, accepted it with his usual "I should worry" air.

"Go ahead," he said jauntily. "You can't make me mad. I'm just crazy to be kitchen police. If I had a popgun I'd shoot a couple of elephants for a nice little fricassee for your supper. But listen,

if you two fall off that cliff, don't expect me to come running and pick you up."

As Mr. Wilde and Billy set off, Warde sulked. Westy said, "I don't think it's fair, and it's just our luck to be kept out of big things."

But Ed said, "Poot! What do you care! I'd just as lieves have a good day's fishing as monkey around up there on the top of the world trying to get movies of the angels. That ole cliff is too high for this baby! It's worse than the Woolworth Tower and *that* always makes me seasick. Come on, let's go fishing. Maybe we'll meet a grizzly."

At this prospect Westy brightened and helped gather up their tackle which Ed opined was "some improvement on that historic safety pin." Warde, however, refused to go along.

"I'm not going," he said. "I turned my ankle on a loose rock last night anyway and it hurts. You catch the fish and I'll cook them—that's fair. I'm going to write a letter home. I don't know when I'll mail it, but I'll get it written anyway."

"'Tain't your ankle, it's your feelings that hurt," said Ed, astutely. "But do as you like, here's where Kit Carson and Dan'l Boone leave you."

S'long," and Westy and Ed disappeared through the woods toward the sound of a boisterous mountain stream, leaving Warde behind. How little they knew what was to happen before they were all together again!

CHAPTER XXXVI

OFF THE CLIFF

It was late in the afternoon when Ed and Westy who had been working their way upstream all day awarded with a goodly string of gleaming trout, found themselves on a high and rocky point from which Vulture Cliff was plainly visible. In the clear mountain air it seemed as if they might almost touch it.

Tired from their scrambles and satisfied with their catch, the boys stretched out on the rocks and gazed up at the cliff. They were separated from it by a narrow gulch of such dizzy depths that Ed said it made him seasick to look down.

"Don't look down, then, look up," said Westy. "You can see the vultures from here."

"Gee, so you can. Don't they look like airplanes? I wonder how big they are?"

"Well," said Westy, "that guide at the Hermitage said he killed one once that measured over eight feet from the tip of one wing to the tip of

the other, spread out. Of course he didn't kill that one on this reservation, but I bet these are just as big."

"I bet they are, and my goodness look what a lot of them there are. They must scent something dead over there," cried Ed in excitement.

"Dead nothing!" Westy disagreed. "Something's scaring them! Look! There's a man! Why, it must be Mr. Wilde; you can see him as plain as plain. I don't see Billy anywhere. Now Mr. Wilde's gone back in the bushes. Let's climb up higher and watch."

They scrambled higher to a point that afforded a very clear view of the precipice opposite. Neither man was now to be seen, but several vultures were circling the cliff and others joined them, perching clumsily on the rock shrugging their ugly humped shoulders in disgust at being disturbed. Out from the wooded height there jutted a long narrow shelf of bare rock that overhung the deep ravine below. This was the vultures' roost and outlook. In crevices along here the monstrous birds had their great awkward nests and here "on top of the world," as Ed said, their little ones were hatched. On the edge of this shelf there grew a solitary

crooked pine, deformed in its efforts to keep a difficult foothold in the barren rock against many a mountain tempest. At the foot of this tree an object caught the boys' eyes. "What's that?" they both cried at once, and squinting against the afternoon sun they shaded their eyes in true Indian fashion and peered intently. It couldn't be! It was! There was no mistaking a *scout uniform* even at this distance. Yet neither boy would believe his eyes. The thing they saw seemed too impossible to be true! Both together they said the same thing at once.

"*That can't be Warde!*" They looked at one another and then back again.

"As sure as you're born, that's Warde Hollister sitting under that tree on the very tip edge of the cliff!"

Westy was so breathless that he could only gasp.

"Why, my gosh!" said Ed irritably, "he's as crazy as a June bug to sit up there on top of the Woolworth and let his silly legs hang over the edge. Hasn't he got any *sense?*"

"Haven't you heard," said Westy, "of people who lose their senses when they get up on something high and want to jump off? What if——"

"What if——" echoed Ed and both felt too horrified to say more. Instinctively they crouched low as if the very sight of Warde so near the dizzy edge made them cling closer to solid rock themselves, not only for their own peace of mind but as if their act might hold Warde back, too.

But now another horror threatened. It was plain that the vultures resented this stranger in their midst. Sweeping forth with wide wings several vultures, apparently startled from their fastnesses on the rocks, swooped out and circled the lone pine.

Mindful of the ghastly story Buck Whitley had told of vultures, both boys shuddered.

"There come some more," Westy whispered—in his fright he could not control his voice to speak aloud. Two more great birds winged out over the gulch and turned in air around the pine. They glided smoothly out on the wind with wings motionless, like monoplanes, but flapping hideously as they returned to their haven in the rocks. It became evident that something out of sight in the woods behind was frightening the birds.

"It's Mr. Wilde!" Westy choked. "He's driving the vultures at Warde on purpose!" As this idea dawned on Ed he felt himself as he afterwards

described it "turning green around the gills." Then his good sense returned.

"Oh, you're crazy!" Ed snapped, and his positive tones cheered Westy greatly. "They don't know he's there! They're just scaring the birds up to photograph them. Can't you see through it? Warde was peeved at being left behind, so he sneaked off on us and beat them to it and now he thinks he's the real smart Alec to get ahead of them out there after Mr. Wilde told us to stay behind. I did think he had more sense than that!"

Two birds were now circling lower and definitely toward the scout-clad figure under the tree. This figure remained so motionless that Westy shuddered and said, "Maybe he's dead already, vultures act that way over dead things."

"Dead, my eye," contradicted Ed, sturdily. "He's not dead. Maybe he's scared to move, or fainted or maybe he's just asleep. Let's climb up higher yet and yell at him." They climbed and shouted, but the distance was too great for their voices to carry and the giant mountains only threw back mocking echoes of their puny lungs at them.

"Those birds must have a nest near that tree," Ed argued, as the huge pair beat their ragged wings

against the scout. The two boys, watching, powerless to help, could only scramble higher hoping to reach a point higher up where they might be seen and signal, but they gained this vantage point just in time to see the khaki figure topple under the vulture wings and tumble down the sheer cliff into the rocks and trees below.

Neither Westy nor Ed dared rise from his place for several minutes, so sickened were they by this fearful sight. Then crawling to the edge, they both ventured to look down. Far, far below they could just make out the khaki figure lying with limbs distorted.

"He's dead," gulped Westy. "Every bone he has must be smashed." He began to cry.

"No, look! He's moving!" True enough, the scout, lying on a sharp decline, turned and slid farther down the ravine.

In another moment the boys above succeeded in getting their shocked minds clear enough to act like scouts.

"We've got to go down and get him," said Westy, asserting himself. "You can't see either Mr. Wilde or Billy and you can't make them hear us. There's no time to waste hunting them up first to help us.

I'm going right down now on a chance I might get to him in time."

"One of us ought to get a doctor," Ed suggested.

"How?" put in Westy.

"Well, don't you remember they had a telephone at the Hermitage? We could phone into Yellowstone for a doctor from there. Good idea. You thought of it, so you go there and I'll climb down after Warde. There's no time to waste, so hurry."

"Oh, I'll hurry. Here, keep these matches and make a signal fire to guide us to you if you can't get out of there by night."

So saying, the boys separated, Westy preparing to descend the dangerous slope, and Ed daring the obscure trail to circle the mountain to Hermitage Rest.

The sun, still bright on the mountain tops, had already left the valleys in a sinister twilight as the boys parted.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ED CARLYLE, SCOUT

ED lost no time in making most of the daylight still remaining to get a good start around the mountain toward Hermitage Rest. For a time this was easy, as the setting sun gave an easy guide to the points of the compass, but before he had gone far down the slope the sun had dropped out of sight behind a mountain top, and as there was only the vaguest trail in these wild parts, Ed soon realized it would take all his scout knowledge to find his way at all. He crashed along through the undergrowth often scaring up wild rabbits and other small animals which on another occasion he would have delighted to stalk, but now his heart was so heavy he hardly noticed them as he hastened on.

Ed had been tramping the woods since morning, with only a light snack at noon, as both he and Westy had looked forward to a good dinner with plenty of fish that night, but now their fish lay abandoned on

the rocks, no doubt making a meal for the vultures, and Ed had no time, even if he had brought along his tackle, to stop and catch fish for his own supper. He could not help wondering what Mr. Wilde and the camera man would think when they returned to camp and found not only no supper but no scouts. A broken piece of sweet chocolate, which he remembered he had in his hip pocket, was the only supper Ed had, and he was hungry enough to feel uncomfortable, but anxiety for Warde and Westy made him forget himself and hurry along.

He took the precaution to fill his canteen with water, then hastened on with no other refreshment. By this time he had retraced the steps over which he and Westy had lingered fishing all day and struck the trail leading down toward the Hermitage.

As he got farther and farther down, the sky grew overcast obscuring all chance of a moon, the trees became denser and Ed found himself in such darkness as to make him feel perilously confused along this unfamiliar trail. Before this he had encountered landmarks which he remembered passing on their way up—a lightning-blasted pine; the big loose rock where Warde had complained of turning his ankle, an abandoned squirrel nest, a fallen tree

and such marks as a trained scout would observe and remember for future guidance. These had made him confident that he had been going the right way, but now it was so dark that Ed could see little before him, and he began to fear that he had lost the trail. For a moment the mountains seemed so vast, the woods so dense, that poor hungry Ed felt like a very small atom alone in the wilderness, and indeed he is not the only boy who would have quailed a little at the task ahead of him! Miles of introdden nightfall, and that grim need for haste, might well dismay a man as well as a boy! However, Ed was stout-hearted and even when alone kept up that humorous spirit of his which so often saved the day.

"Alone in the great city," he muttered, as he stumbled over a log, "I better ask my way of the next policeman." Cheering up a little at this, he plunged on, but was brought to a standstill by a thicket through which he could not pass, and this made him realize he was off the trail.

Knowing that every minute's delay might mean life or death to Warde, Ed found himself choking up with fear lest he get lost in the woods and fail to get a doctor in time. Just as he had often re-

stored the other boy's spirits in moments of trial by his unquenchable humor, Ed now bolstered up his own waning courage by comic comments to himself. "Gosh, these street lights are bum," he complained, and blundered around, beating at twigs until he pushed through to a clearer stretch beyond.

He began to be thankful that he had not worn his scout uniform after all, for the thicket had torn his shirt, scraped off his cap and scratched his face, and the corduroy knickers he wore protected his legs and knees far more comfortably than his loose khaki shorts would have done. Ed had been forcing his way along, now running against logs, now falling over rocks—into gullies until he felt that he must surely have progressed miles, when something soft slapped him in the face. He ducked down, startled, and saw that he had run into a bush on which what was hanging but his own cap! It was this cap lost in the thicket that had struck him in the face! Now, indeed, Ed was discouraged. After supposing he had made a long advance toward Hermitage Rest he only found that he had done the usual tenderfoot trick of traveling in a circle!

"Spats, cane and all, I ought to have old Stove

Polish leading me by the hand," was his disgusted thought.

But now, however, Ed's eyes were becoming accustomed to the dark and he was able to make out his way more distinctly.

Fortunately at this time the moon came out through clouds that had obscured it. As good luck would have it, the moon was nearly full and promised to shed a helpful light if more clouds did not gather. Ed remembered that the moon, when large and red as it was then, rose in the east, for he could remember often making a wish on a little new moon, seen first in the western sky at sunset. Assuring himself once more of the points of the compass by the moon and the direction of the hillside, Ed gritted his teeth and pushed on, determined to make no further tenderfoot blunders that night. His chagrin was almost as deep as Westy's would have been at the thought of how Mr. Wilde would have jeered at him for being a parlor scout who got lost in the woods! His progress was now more successful, but he had every reason to fear that he might lose himself again, and therefore proceeded with far less confidence than he had set out. As if with the coming of the moon the little people of

the woods were stirred to the business of their night life, the trees seemed noisy now with insects and night birds. The grewsome hoot of an owl sent the gooseflesh crawling up to Ed's scalp, but he made fun of himself and pushed on, whistling to keep up his spirits. He had really advanced a long way when he was brought to a standstill by a sound that made his blood run cold. It was a moaning that had such a human quality that for a moment Ed thought some one must be lying hurt near by. Then he remembered having read that the voice of the mountain lion sounds like a woman crying. The moaning recommenced and Ed stood paralyzed in his tracks. Of all creatures, the mountain lion, he knew, was the most ferocious wild beast in all the wild Rockies. Even a seasoned old hunter like Buck Whitley did not scorn to run away from one of these creatures. Ed besides was of course unarmed save for a broken-bladed scout knife and his trusty safety-pin.

The moaning continued and Ed located it as coming from a clump of bushes near the trail right by which he must pass. It must be admitted that Ed was thoroughly frightened, but he took some comfort in recalling the story of an officer who had

been chided because on the eve of battle his knees shook and this officer had replied, "They would shake more if they knew where I was going to take them." Ed took his shaking knees back up the path, determined to detour and make a run for it. Just then, however, the moaning broke into a call. "Hey, there! Help!" cried a man's voice.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE WOUNDED STRANGER

ED was so relieved to hear a human voice that, as he said afterwards, "If it had been Bloodhound Pete himself I'd have welcomed him with open arms." He hurried to the bushes looking down and saw there upon the ground the figure of a man. Stooping down, Ed made out a short disreputable man wearing an old sweater and peaked cap.

"What's the matter?" Ed cried, stretching out his hand to help him up. "I'm shot," groaned the stranger, and Ed drew back his hand quickly, to find his fingers wet and sticky. With a shudder Ed realized that this was blood.

When this sorry figure saw that his rescuer was a mere boy in knickers an ugly scowl twisted his unpleasant features and he swore. "Who you with? Where's your pa?" he snarled.

"I'm alone," Ed replied. "What's the matter? Can I help?"

"Well, half a loaf's better than no bread, I s'pose," the stranger retorted ungraciously. "See here, I was huntin' and got shot to pieces accidentally, see? Get somebody to tie me up and carry me outa dis hold."

"You're not supposed to hunt on this reservation," put in Ed.

"Dat's none o' your business," snapped the wounded man, angry to see he had made a slip.

"I can tie you up some," Ed offered, although he hesitated to stop for this "good turn" when Warde was in danger. However, though torn between two duties, he felt that he could do nothing else but render first aid to this man as quickly as he could.

The water in his canteen came in handy now, and he bathed the gunshot wound in the man's head and shoulder as best he could. The man, disappointed that the canteen contained not whiskey, but good water, cursed fretfully.

Ed found that doing practicing bandaging on an obliging fellow scout was a very different thing from binding up the hot, wet wounds of this man, who groaned in agony when touched. Privately Ed suspected the man as having been shot for a

poacher or wounded in some bootleg scuffle perhaps as he carried no rifle or hunting outfit, and Ed entertained no very good opinion of him. His opinion, however, did not effect the thoroughness with which he tried to do the job. He tore up what remained of his ragged shirt, bandaged the man's head, and made an emergency sling to ease his arm. The man could not bear to be moved, so Ed simply made him as comfortable as he could with a soft pile of leaves and promised to bring a doctor. The man's gruffness had melted and he said, "You'se is a good little kid, and I won't forget it. Beat it along now and hurry back."

Ed then redoubled his speed down the mountain-side in vain endeavor to make up for lost time. Trudging on and on, refusing to stop for sleep or rest, Ed walked all night long.

Dawn was just tinging the eastern mountain rims when Buck Whitley, an early bird, beheld a weird sight approaching the main cabin at Hermitage Rest. A small boy in undershirt and torn trousers stumbled wearily up the steps and collapsed.

CHAPTER XXXIX

WESTY'S DESCENT

WESTY MARTIN lost no time in starting down the face of the ravine toward his friend. The cliff he descended was so precipitous that the problem of reaching the bottom alive absorbed all his attention and he had no time to worry much over what condition he might find Warde in. Occasionally, as he hung by his fingers from one rock and ventured to drop to a shelf below, he wondered how anything could be left of Warde at all. Sometimes the loose stones and dirt gave way under his feet and sent him tumbling until he could clutch a bush and hold on, only to find his hands and knees skinned raw. Pausing to pant and gain his balance, Westy would try not to wonder whether the vultures would leave anything of Warde for him to find. It was lucky for Westy that the sunlight, reflected against these steep rocks which directly faced the sunset, lit up the ravine long after Ed, on the opposite side of

the mountain, was left in darkness. For Westy, in darkness, would have been in peril indeed, since the task he was attempting seemed to him very like those movie scenes of a Human Fly crawling down the face of a skyscraper! Had this ravine been an Alpine pass traversed by mountain-climbing tourists, each tourist would have been roped to another and guides would have controlled these safety lines. Such a descent Westy was daring all alone. He came at last to a narrow and abrupt slide between two long walls of rock. Here there were few bushes to hold back by and the only thing to do, Westy decided, was to sit down and slide. To climb back and hunt another way down was impossible. So down he sat and slid cautiously, but try as he might to brake his pace with his feet, he shot faster and faster until he had every fear that he would shoot clean off the mountainside and land below, food for vultures too. Vainly he spread his feet and clutched at the rocks with his hands until his fingers bled. He could not stop himself, but, gathering momentum, he shot down the mountain slide faster than before. Ahead of him the rocks narrowed so that while at first he had a gleam of hope that they would stop his fall, on tumbling

nearer he felt sure that to dash against them at his present speed would only dash out his brains and at best break all his ribs. With never a thought that he might shoot over an edge into eternity, Westy quickly lay flat on his back and in a spatter of pebbles and cloud of dust shot safely between the narrow walls of rock just skinning both shoulders. He found himself riding on a miniature landslide coasting quickly toward the edge of overhanging rock and his heart leapt to his throat as he realized he might as well fall off a twelve-story fire-escape to pavements below, as hope to survive the dashing to pieces which he now faced. In the flash of time that it took for the falling dirt to shoot him out on this ledge, he had one sickening moment when he wished he had never heard of scouting, and it must be confessed he offered up a quick prayer for help. Then the miracle happened, as if in answer to this prayer. He stopped as suddenly as he had started. The seat of his breeches had caught on the branches of a small scrub pine that thrust out from between rocks in the path of his descent, and this had checked his fall. For a moment Westy hardly dared draw breath for fear brush or breeches give way. Then, securing a grip on the friendly little

pine and assuring himself that it was rooted sturdily, Westy cautiously freed himself and lay down to study the way ahead. It was less steep below, and, lowering himself down inch by inch, Westy was soon on a safe way to the bottom. His shirt was scraped off from neck to belt, including considerable skin, the seat of his trousers could never be the same again, but save for such battle scars, Westy, to his surprise and thankfulness, was not so much the worse for all the hard wear and tear he had undergone "skidding down the face of the Woolworth Tower," as Ed would have said. Westy now faced the task of finding Warde. This was made only too easy by the sight of vultures ahead. Furious at these loathsome scavengers Westy ran headlong, yelling to frighten them away. The sight ahead made him pause and feel too faint to move.

Two giant birds were tearing at the scout figure with their hideous curved beaks. Westy was near enough to see their powerful crooked claws with which they helped in tearing his friend's khaki suit. The bird's ugly naked necks twisted to and fro in their bloody task. A great smear of red discolored the tunic. At Westy's approach the huge birds

flapped roughly away on ragged wings that made a great creaking and rustling and left behind the smell of carrion.

Westy could never tell how he summoned courage to approach that lump of blood and khaki. But when he finally found himself standing by it he could not believe his eyes. This was not Warde he was gazing at, but a mere dummy stuffed with sticks and leaves and baited with some meat and old dead fish! It was only a scarecrow that had fallen over the cliff!

Bewildered by this unbelievable hoax Westy stood spellbound. At this moment a great scrambling and shouting followed by hearty laughter broke upon him and Mr. Wilde, followed by Billy, the camera man, came out of the woods opposite, convulsed with loud guffaws.

"Well, young one, if I ever called you a little Lord Fauntleroy I take it all back now," roared Mr. Wilde. "You're the original Douglas Fairbanks and a true screen star. You've made this film a howling success." Whereupon he doubled up with laughter which cramped him so violently that for a time he could not speak.

"Oh, laugh! laugh!" urged Billy, ironically, rub-

bing at his neck. "It's awful funny! Oh, yes! A mere incident like breaking my only neck in the cause is nothing! Oh, no! Laugh! Laugh by all means!"

"Well, what is he laughing at?" demanded Westy crossly. Here was Westy, his clothes and skin peeled off in too many places for comfort and after risking life and limb and undergoing the nervous shock of hours of horror. He was now simply laughed at. Small wonder if Westy felt sore in spirit as well as in body. Billy explained as Mr. Wilde could do nothing but snicker.

"Why, he wanted to film the birds in the act of knocking some one off a cliff, and I don't doubt he'd have used me for that part if he didn't need me to crank the camera. Anyway, he spared me and rigged up a dummy. He didn't want you kids getting into danger up there so he said nothing to you. You remember Ed didn't wear his scout suit. —Well, we took that along to stuff for a dummy. We had to bait the scarecrow with stuff to attract the old buzzards, and for that we'd brought along some meat anyway, and we just stuffed it inside the suit. I'm afraid Ed's suit is ruined; we didn't expect that. We'll get him another. It was well

worth the price, for it all worked out fine after we'd worked all day up there, scaring up those birds and trying to hide from them and focus on the dummy and all. Just as the sunlight began to go back on us the birds condescended to star for something elegant. They knocked the boy scout over the cliff and I filmed it for a thriller. Well, then something happened that we hadn't bargained for and it was too good to miss. We saw you start down the cliff on the other side. Mr. Wilde was afraid you'd fall, but I said, no, you could make it all right, you weren't a scout for nothing and when you didn't hear him when he yelled to you to go back I said, 'let him go ahead and I'll snap him too and we can add it to the picture as the "Daredevil Rescue."' Well, it was too good to miss. We followed along down after you on the other side and I hope to say the movie fan's hair will stick up on end when they see you shoot the shoots and hang over the Leap of Death by the seat of your pants. It was wonderful! Doug Fairbanks isn't in it. I'm sorry to say it got too dark for me to get you when you discover the body and you'll have to act that over for me in broad daylight. Of course the fact that I had to run along holding on

by my eyelashes in steep spots just to film you, is a mere detail. Wilde just kept laughing and hol-
lering at me, 'Shoot! shoot! There's a good one, shoot!' and I said, 'I'll break my neck at this,' and he said, 'Well, don't break the camera.' Oh, a camera man has a sweet life. I twisted every joint out of socket on the way down, but, oh, boy, wait till you see yourself in that picture!"

This pleasing prospect cheered Westy enough to remove the sting of ridicule that pricked him when he saw he had been made the goat, and be it said to his credit that he joined Mr. Wilde in laughing at himself.

"Yes, but what about Ed?" he asked.

CHAPTER XL

WARDE MEETS A GRIZZLY

IN the meanwhile, what had Warde been doing?

After he was left alone in camp, he dutifully tidied up the place, bathed his aching ankle and wrote home as he planned. The writing took a long time as he was slow and had so much to tell. Warde did not enjoy writing letters and when he had finished he felt as cramped and tired as if he had chopped a cord of firewood. The sharp mountain air helped make him sleepy and when he stretched out on the grass to rest for "just a minute," sleep overcame him and he took a nap like a baby. When he waked he did not need the short shadows of the noon sun directly overhead to tell him it was lunch time. Disappointed that his pals had not returned he rummaged about for a snack of bread and bacon for himself. He began to long for companionship, but did not dare to wander off far from camp for fear the boys would return and he would miss them and any fun on

foot. So Warde stayed in camp until he fidgeted alone and decided to use his time to good advantage by collecting firewood. This he did so industriously that soon he had a fine pile. On coming back to it with another armful of sticks Warde saw something moving by one tent. Mr. Wilde and Billy shared one tent, the boys another, while the camera and camp supplies were stored in a third. Something was moving near the tent where the provisions were kept.

Overjoyed, after his long solitude at seeing what he supposed of course was Ed or Westy, Warde shouted. At the sound of his voice the intruder started and reared up. It was an enormous grizzly bear!

You may imagine that Warde stopped stock-still, unable to move hand or foot. He seemed turned to stone and did not even drop his sticks.

The grizzly stood on his hind legs, solemnly regarding him and he did not move either. It would have been worth Billy's while to have been behind a bush then with his camera, for the picture of boy and bear each standing staring at one another would have been another thriller to his credit.

The grizzly was taller than a tall man as he

stood there, his forepaws bent as if contemplating one vast and soft embrace.

Warde's instinct to heave one of his sticks at the animal he checked as foolhardy, for such an attack would be sure to enrage the brute. Warde softly stepped backward. The bear stepped forward. Warde ventured another backstep, the bear dropped to all fours with a windy "snoof" and advanced toward him.

At this point Warde thought wildly of climbing a tree. But he could not remember whether grizzly bears climb trees or not. At any rate, the idea of scrambling up a tree trunk with the bear clawing at his back did not appeal at this time to our hero. He wished more than ever that his fellow scouts would appear. Then the remembrance of Westy's accusation that they were only "parlor scouts" stung him and he resolved to act in a manner worthy a real scout. Just what this would be was the puzzle. Warde had seen grizzlies in the zoo, of course, but he missed the trusty iron bars from the landscape now. Thought of the zoo recalled the fact that at feeding time the keepers threw loaves of bread to them. If he could only circle about and reach the provisions perhaps the bear

would eat bread or something instead of boy. Do grizzlies eat boys or do they not? The answer to this was as vague in Warde's mind as the answer to, Do they climb trees? At any rate he remembered that they hugged their victims to death, crushing them in that fur and iron embrace. Nothing appealed less to Warde at this moment than any such show of affection! He tried to ease around behind the woodpile and the bear began to follow him. "At any rate," thought Warde, "while the old boy keeps down on all fours he can't hug me." He moved cautiously and the bear advanced threateningly. Warde felt the natural impulse to turn and run, but the idea of the bear galloping behind halted this. To keep running, pursued by a bear, was too much like a bad dream in which the bear comes even closer and you can't move your feet. Warde decided it was less harrowing to stand his ground and face the brute. At any rate the bear had not emitted any blood-curdling "feeding-time-at-the-zoo" growls. He only gave a few "snoofs" not unlike a pet dog. Warde maneuvered about keeping tent or woodpile cautiously between himself and his visitor and the bear lumbered after him. In this way Warde finally reached the provisions

and finding a pan of Billy's biscuits still on hand, he tossed one at the bear. It snapped this up eagerly and lunged forward. Stepping backward inhospitably, Warde threw another biscuit and threw it good and far. The bear turned and trotted after it. By throwing the biscuits one at a time with all the snap of a Big League pitcher, Warde succeeded in keeping the great animal at a comfortable distance. It reminded him of those stories of Russia when the sleigh is pursued by wolves and one by one the riders jump overboard as sacrifice to delay the pack so that the sole surviving heroine may escape. Warde hated to think what he would do when all the biscuits were gone.

He felt sure he could not continue to throw every piece of food they had to the bear. Finally the last remaining biscuit went, and, impatient for more, the bear came forward at a brisk and clumsy trot. Warde felt it was just as well to side step. The big creature thrust himself into the tent and tumbled everything about, now stopping to snap up a tidbit, now investigating and upsetting boxes with his nose. At last he came to Billy's camera supplies. Here in tin boxes were spare films and if anything destroyed these, the expedition was

spoiled. At this point Warde asserted himself. To tell the truth he had rather envied the glory Westy acquired in his encounter with Bloodhound Pete. The bear did not seem too ferocious and Warde felt that here was a chance for him to outwit the animal and win for himself perhaps a modicum of fame. He tried to think what he had ever heard about bears, and to save his life could only recall the adventure of the absurd Goldilocks and the repeated, "Who has been sleeping in my bed?" said the middle-sized bear in his middle-sized voice. You will admit that Goldilocks was not a great help to a scout facing a Rocky Mountain grizzly! Why is it the most foolish thoughts occur to you in moments of stress? Warde felt very annoyed that people filled up children's minds on that silly stuff instead of teaching them useful things like how to drive away live bears that are licking your biscuit pan. Warde couldn't seem to think up anything to stop the bear's dishwashing, and like a good many other people when baffled he blamed it on his education. "Gosh," he thought indignantly, "when *I* have a boy I won't waste his time on nursery rimes; I'll bring him up to things that amount to something in a pinch!"

It was when the bear nosed at the camera boxes again that Warde was spurred to action. He felt that the day would be lost if he did not protect those precious films for which they were undertaking this whole trip. Pressed with need to act, Warde suddenly was blessed with an idea. He remembered the adage that no animal can look you in the eye. He ventured therefore to advance and glare unblinkingly straight into the bear's eyes. The bear snarled and shook his head. Instead of backing away, however, to Warde's dismay he came straight at him with a "snoofy" challenge. Through Warde's mind had been running a hodge-podge of all the wild animal stories he had ever read and now there flashed to his mind one from an old volume of St. Nicholas. In this tale an East Indian boy saves a white baby from a tiger by blowing tunes on a piccolo. It seemed animals do not like music any better than your cat does. Now it just happened that Billy was one of those chaps who always blew tunes on a harmonica. He had driven them crazy with this all the way up, and his harmonica was at that moment in his coat pocket and the coat hung on a tree where he had left it for a strenuous day in shirtsleeves. Warde felt a

thrill of pride at the ingenious idea. He succeeded in reaching the coat pocket, extracted the mouth organ and began to play. There was only one tune he knew how to play and that was "Home, Sweet Home." As the seedy notes of this familiar song piped up on the forest air, the bear acted very strangely. Perhaps you think he, like the tiger, fled obligingly. Oh, no! Perhaps a grizzly likes a mouth harp as much as a tiger dislikes a piccolo. Perhaps the tiger would have liked the mouth harp and perchance the bear would have fled before a piccolo. There is no telling. But the truth of the matter is that the grizzly actually enjoyed "Home, Sweet Home." Instead of turning tail—what little tail he had! and leaving—he simply rose to his full height on his great haunches and swayed in waltz time. He even seemed to grin.

A suspicion now dawned on Warde that this chummy bear was no wild beast, but one of the amiable tame bears of Yellowstone Park, straying through the wilderness in which he knew well enough, no doubt, he was protected by benign game laws.

A vast relief loosened the nervous tightness in his chest. Immediately after this relief, however,

Warde felt a sort of disappointment that he was done out of an opportunity to play the hero. "At any rate," he comforted himself, "I'm glad I found it out myself before any of the others got the laugh on me." At this moment, however, an opportunity to assert himself did arise, for the bear, still hungry, insisted on nosing in among the supplies again and threatened to upset and ruin the films. It was at this point that Warde got his first really useful inspiration. He suddenly remembered that it was *fire* that frightened animals away. He lost no time in kindling a dry pine branch which flared up fiercely. This he waved at the bear and the bear backed away. A little thrill of triumph tingled up Warde's spine. He was not altogether made a clown of now, and in protecting those films as well as the grub even from a *friendly* bear he was proving himself a valuable camp guard. He waved his torch and the bear with a snort of disgust, wheeled away. It must not be supposed that he disappeared altogether, not he. He sat down at a distance and licked out his pink tongue. He was not longing to crunch Warde's bones, he only pined, pathetically, for biscuits. From time to time he ventured nearer. Between the bear and the films Warde stood guard

with his torch and he realized that danger from any carelessness with the fire might prove more disastrous to the inflammable celluloids than the bear's mischief.

Evening was now approaching and surely, Warde thought, some of the campers would return! Where were those fish Mr. Wilde had demanded? Warde began to fear some accident had happened. He decided, as it grew later, that the best thing he could do was to get the camp ready in case something had happened to one of his friends. Always thoroughly practical, he made up all the bunks comfortably for the night, pausing to wave a firebrand at his friend the bear from time to time as a warning to keep his distance. He built a roaring fire to keep off other animals, to keep up his own spirits and to act as a signal to his friends if they were lost. He heated plenty of hot water to have on hand in case of an emergency, and finally he prepared flapjacks for supper. No one came to help eat them and finally he began to cook some for himself. This appetizing smell lured the bear back into the circle of firelight, and so tantalized was he and so curious that he half lost his fear of flames and stood not far off wrinkling up his nose. This was

a little too much for Warde. It had become really dark now, and with no sign or sound of his comrades he began to be alarmed lest some serious accident prevented their return. He had been alone all day long and this loneliness at night in the woods began to tell on him. He welcomed even the presence of this bear now. Recalling the fact that bears have such a sweet tooth that they risk getting stung while clawing for honey in a bee tree, he threw a flapjack dripping with syrup at his old friend. The bear delightedly gulped it down. This amused Warde and diverted him from his worries. He tossed another. The bear was charmed. Each had lost all fear of the other now. Bear and boy had supper together. This strangely comforted the lonely, worried Warde. It was as if when in trouble your pet Airedale nosed up with sympathy. Well fed, the bear waddled out of range of the fire, stretched out and napped. Warde, stoking his fire from time to time, determined to sit up all night if need be, and stick to his post to be ready when needed. But any boy who deliberately says, "Now I am going to sit up all night," soon finds his eyelids weighted. Warde fought off sleep valiantly. But as though a chloroform sponge were pressed on

his nose, he succumbed and slumbered. Opposite him, a little away from the fire, the big grizzly lay snoozing too. From time to time he snored.

It was late moonshine when Warde was startled to wakefulness by the sound of voices and footsteps. Mr. Wilde, Billy and Westy had returned, having waited until the moon made possible an exit from the ravine by a longer, but safer, route than the cliff. Their battered aspect showed how welcome the hot sponge off from Warde's kettle of water would prove.

"Good boy to keep up the fire," approved Mr. Wilde. "We never would have found this joint at night without that light. Jumping Jehoshaphat—*what is that?*"

That was the grizzly bear, disturbed and disgruntled by so many noisy newcomers. He lumbered away into the woods and never was seen again. Needless to say, Warde from that day to this has always been nicknamed "Old Grizzly."

"What's that?" echoed Warde airily, "why, that's just my chum, Old Featherbed. Ain't we cozy?"

"What's the idea?" asked the startled Billy. When Warde explained that, though amiable, the

bear's curiosity made him too nosy among the films, Bill stuck out his hand.

"Put it there, pard!" he cried. "You saved the whole party. Without my films this trip is nothing. Mr. Wilde, you got to hand it to these boys. While one stars in a screen triumph of Daredevil Dick the other rescues the spare celluloids from all the wild animals in the ark. You better take them into the firm."

"I guess I'll have to," agreed Mr. Wilde. "By the way, where's that other member of the firm—Ed?"

CHAPTER XLI

A SCOUT MASCOT

As we already know, Ed did not return that night. Alarmed that some danger had befallen him, the campers took council as to what had best be done. To search that vast range at night on the mere chance that Ed was lost was worse than the proverbial needle-in-the-hay-stack hunt. Besides, Mr. Wilde said he was satisfied now that these scouts could ably take care of themselves in emergencies. This admission from him filled Westy and Warde with deep pride. They had indeed made good in his eyes. It was agreed that they wait until daylight and then hit the trail to Hermitage Rest to inquire if Ed had reached there safely, and if not to organize a search party. Mr. Wilde confessed to a twinge of conscience that the scouts had undergone such dangers. Until daylight could clear matters up it was thought best to get what rest they could in all that remained of the night in order

to be fit for whatever emergency might tax them the next day. Westy, for one, was fatigued beyond any further endurance, and indeed the cliff climbing exertion had so worn out even Billy and Mr. Wilde that they were more than grateful for Warde's thoughtfulness in having the bunks all ready to fall into. So fatigued were all three of the vulture hunters that they lay as if drugged and no wonder overslept themselves in the morning. They woke to find that the practical Warde had breakfast all prepared so that no time might be lost in starting out to find Ed.

Their late breakfast, however, had scarcely been finished when voices were heard coming up the trail and Ed himself appeared, leading a party of men. Although exhausted from his night's hike, Ed insisted on guiding the relief party back as soon as he had been refreshed with black coffee and an ample breakfast. The party consisted of Buck himself, together with several men from Hermitage Rest, one of whom fortunately happened to be a doctor so that no time was needed to phone to Yellowstone for a surgeon after all. The doctor, kit in hand, hastened forward with Ed, expecting a nasty job with a mangled boy. Imagine his aston-

ishment and Ed's embarrassment when the unexpected outcome was explained.

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall," jeered Warde, who ever since the bear episode had his mind pestered with nursery rimes. "Sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a big fall, all the Hermitage doctors and all Ed's men couldn't put Humpty together again."

It was a long time before Warde, who had *not* been dashed to pieces over the cliff, would quit calling Westy and Ed "Humpty" and "Dumpty."

The doctor expressed himself as only too glad to find that in spite of his trip, his services were not needed in camp. To Mr. Wilde's apologies he said, "I have all I can do with a patient farther down the trail and since I am not needed here, I propose that we return to him and try to move him to Hermitage Rest where good care may possibly save his life. He is so far gone from loss of blood from his gunshot wounds that I may have to do a blood transfusion to save him, if I can get any one to volunteer to give him some of theirs."

"I will!" Ed offered promptly, for he felt that this was his own particular patient and he felt glad

that his efforts to get a doctor in a hurry were really useful after all.

All hands started down the trail at once to see Ed's stranger, who had been left where he lay in charge of a man who volunteered as nurse. By daylight and with Buck, who knew the mountains as you know your own backyard, it took far less time to reach the stranger than it had taken Ed by night.

The wounded man lay on the ground, looking weaker than when Ed found him. At sight of his face, cap and sweater, Westy could not repress an exclamation, "Why, I've seen him before!" he gasped. "So have I," added Mr. Wilde grimly—"he's Bloodhound Pete's partner." At this identification, the man groaned.

"Where's Pete?" demanded Mr. Wilde.

"He's gone, but before he left he got me good," muttered the man.

"Somebody crooked a wallet from Pete one night and he claimed I done it," said the man, and then went on to tell this story. "So he beat me up next day and at de point of his gat he drove me miles out here where he said he could leave me dead and

nobody would ever find it out but de buzzards. Den he shot at me and I run and he come after and I hid behind trees and shot at him, but he had two guns and he's dead-eye with both. Pete'll kill any pal he has if he thinks he turns on him. I ain't the first he's tried to do for. He wouldn't believe me when I said I hadn't crooked the swag off him. He said I was de only one in miles of him dat night. Well, he must of lost it hisself. I know I didn't take it. Anyways, it was gone, and he shot me and left me for dead where de buzzards would of picked me bones in a couple more hours if it hadn't a been for dis young kid."

"This kid here," said Mr. Wilde, pushing Westy forward, "is the one who outwitted Pete."

"Well, he done for me, I guess," snarled the man. "I ain't never squealed on a pal before, but Pete done me dirt, and I'll give him away now so de police can square wid him."

It was this information which made it possible later for the mounted state police to pursue the notorious Bloodhound through the forests and eventually see that he was safely behind bars. Ed felt that in spite of Humpty Dumpty, his night's work had not been in vain.

In the meanwhile, however, it was necessary to move Pete's partner to Hermitage Rest for surgical care if the man was to stand any chance of life at all.

"Your young friend, Ed, here, has offered to supply you with some of his blood if necessary," said the doctor. The sick man's eyes, small and evil though they were, filled with tears.

"Listen," he said, "I know I ain't gointer live and I don't care. I ain't got one thing in dis world to live for nohow, but I want to say before I go dat only two people in dis world ever treated me white. One was my old mother, dead and gone now, peace to her soul, and de other is dis kid. Kid, I hear you got de same name as mine and I'd like to give you something to remember me by, and every time you look at it you remember to steer clear of de line I got into. Here's me watch me mother give me when I was twenty-one. You keep it and remember me. Look inside de lid and see wat it says there and then think wat a mess I made of all she wished for me."

Ed reverently opened the lid. Carved on the inside of the old-fashioned silver case were these words:

"TO EDDIE

FROM MOTHER

Hoping He Will Always Be a Good Man!"

There was considerable clearing of manly throats as Ed Carlyle, reading this, touched the hearts of all those grouped about the sad figure on the ground.

"Come, come," broke in the doctor cheerfully. "You aren't ready for your funeral yet by any means, my man. I can patch you up as well as ever and unless I miss my guess you have many years ahead in which you can make up for lost time in leading a useful life with this young scout as your mascot, eh, Eddie?"

"Sure you will," said Buck. "You can stay at my place until you're well and then I'll give you a job. You ain't the first tough character I've seen come to his senses and make good. Let's get a move on now, and mosey on down to a good bed and good grub."

It was agreed that Ed should accompany them back, as he too was in great need of a good bed and long sleep. Westy, however, had to remain with Billy to act out again for the camera man a

scene depicting the rescue and first aid, which he had failed to complete the day before. The practical Warde was to return and help break up camp, and the scouts would join one another at Hermitage Rest the next day.

As they parted, Mr. Wilde shook hands with Ed and said, "I have to take back all that jollyng I gave you scouts and I want to say now that next summer I am planning a trip to take motion pictures of wild animals and I would like very much indeed if the three of you could come along and help make that trip a success."

"Wow! You *bet* we will!" shouted all three joyfully, hilarious at the prospect that their adventures should continue together through another vacation.

THE END



ARTIE HALF-CARRIED UNCLE JEB INTO THE CABIN AND
LAID HIM IN HIS BUNK.

WESTY MARTIN IN THE ROCKIES

BY
PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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WESTY MARTIN IN THE ROCKIES

CHAPTER I

A SURE AIM

WESTY MARTIN sat speechless in utter consternation. He glanced about him as if dazed. He seemed to be trying to make sure that he was awake, that the whole thing was not a dream. Then a sudden burst of shouting and applause recalled him to the reality of the clamorous scene.

The scene was very real. It was a familiar scene at Temple Camp and real with the savory realities of clam chowder and hunter's stew and crullers piled high in tin dishpans. And waffles built into miniature skyscrapers and big glass pitchers full of sirup and honey. And Pee-wee Harris shouting, "I'll go with you, I'll go with you, I'll be the one!" And Uncle Jeb Rushmore sitting at the head of the "eats

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board" with a smile of amusement hovering under his drooping white mustache.

Uncle Jeb Rushmore was one of those men who looked out of place at a dining table, even at a rustic "eats board." By all the rules he should have eaten his meals squatting on the ground in proximity to a campfire, in the dense wilderness or on the prairie. He should never have eaten a meal without his trusty rifle by his side and without a keen eye on the lookout for stealthy Indians. He should certainly never have been waited on by a smiling negro connected with the cooking shack of a great modern camp. He should have dined in remote fastnesses, mountain passes, and in sound of the appalling voices of savage beasts. Everything about Uncle Jeb suggested not the covered table, but the covered wagon. He was an old western trapper and guide who had cooked bear's meat with Buffalo Bill and fried his venison on silent trails while the caravan waited.

That this picturesque old member of a race that has all but passed away should be sitting at the head of a camp "eats board" was the fault of Mr. John Temple, the beneficent founder of Temple Camp in the Catskills. And so Westy Martin, scout, became identified with a series of adventures which I shall

chronicle for you; adventures in the wildest region of the Wild West. Such adventures as boys do not even read of in these days of football and baseball and boarding schools and Saturday hikes. It is odd, when you come to think of it, how things happen. That Westy Martin should participate in adventures which in these days are commonly thought too extravagant even for boy's stories! Yet this thing happened and it should be told. If the worst that can be said about it is that it is a wild-west story I will gladly bear the responsibility of telling it to my young friends.

To go back to where I started—they were having dinner at Temple Camp. It was Labor Day and soon the camp would close for the season. Mr. John Temple, was its guest, as he usually was just before the season closed. He was standing at the head of the main "eats board" and it was something which he had just said in the course of his remarks that had set Westy Martin aghast. There were three of these "eats boards" in a vast open pavilion. The middle one was larger than the two that flanked it, and it was at the head of this large, rustic table that the guest of honor had been seated. At the head of Westy's table sat Uncle Jeb in his accustomed place.

And at the head of the other sat Mr. Bronson, resident trustee. Somewhat removed from these three enormous dining boards was another rough table for scoutmasters. In that great scout community some troops cooked their own meals near their cabins, but all were crowded in the "eats" pavilion on this memorable day in honor of the distinguished visitor.

"And now one word more," said Mr. Temple. "It is both good news and bad news. Those of you who come next summer will not see Uncle Jeb." Murmurs of surprise and apprehension greeted this announcement. "Uncle Jeb is going home, not to stay, but to visit for a season his beloved Montana and his old cabin, those scenes which I took him from to bring him here. I think you will all agree—our trustees have already agreed—that Uncle Jeb is entitled to visit his old home. He expects to return here next fall or, at the latest, early the following spring. He has said that he will do that, and as you know Uncle Jeb always hits the mark. He aims to be back with you after next summer and I never heard anybody ever say that he missed his aim." This remark was greeted with laughter and applause.

"There is one thing more," said Mr. Temple. "It has been thought that Uncle Jeb's sojourn might

afford a couple of our scouts an opportunity to visit the woolly West; I mean the regular West with all its wool on; the West that Uncle Jeb knows and which he once showed me. Uncle Jeb himself seems to like that idea. So I suggested that he be asked to choose one of the boys he knows best to go with him, and that this fortunate boy be permitted to choose a comrade in the great adventure. Uncle Jeb has named Westy Martin of the First Bridgeboro Troop of Bridgeboro, New Jersey. Westy Martin," Mr. Temple added, glancing about, "wherever you are, I congratulate you."

"There he is, third from the end, eating a waffle!" thundered the uproarious voice of Pee-wee Harris, "and I'll be the one to go with him!"

So you see how it was. Uncle Jeb was seven years older than when he had come to cast the glow of pioneer and western romance over Temple Camp. But his eye was just as keen and his aim was just as true as in the days when he had hunted grizzlies and struck terror to Indians in his beloved Rockies. For those keen gray eyes had seen Westy Martin and picked him out and knocked him clean off his feet, in a way of speaking. . . .

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRIT OF THE CAMP

WHEN Mr. John Temple conceived the big scout community which came to be known the country over as Temple Camp, he had an inspiration that showed his fine understanding of the scout idea.

He decided to introduce into the camp something which neither the solemn woods nor the tranquil lake could give it; something which all the projected rustic architecture could not supply. And that was an atmosphere.

He was resolved that the scouts who flocked to the sequestered lakeside resort should live in proximity to a real scout, one who had lived the sort of life that is commemorated by scouting.

He would bring the prairies and the Rockies and the long, winding trails, and all the associations which cluster about Indians and grizzlies and buffaloes to Temple Camp in the romantic person of an old western scout and guide whom he had met while in the Far West on railroad business. Old Jeb Rush-

more had guided Mr. Temple and a party of surveyors to a pass in the mountains following what he called a trail which was about as discernible to Mr. Temple as a trail left by an airplane. The founder of the camp had spent a night in Rushmore's lonely cabin in Montana and had heard the voice of a grizzly in the distance.

A year later when land had been bought for the big camp in the Catskills, Mr. Temple recalled that his old guide had told him that he expected soon to give up his cabin in the Rockies and end his days at Fort Benton in his beloved Montana. "Reckon I'm gettin' old," he had told Mr. Temple. "That's one thing yer can't shoot," he had added. Indeed old age was the only foe that had a ghost of a chance of stealing up on him.

So Mr. Temple invited Jeb Rushmore to come and live at Temple Camp and the old scout, after some hesitation, agreed to do so. He spent one night at the magnificent Temple residence in Bridgeboro where he seemed not the least bit embarrassed by the gorgeous surroundings. He smoked his pipe in Mr. Temple's library and when that gentleman related how he had gone to Washington once to seek an audience with President Roosevelt, Jeb Rushmore

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casually remarked that he and Roosevelt had hunted together in the Rockies. It developed that Mr. Temple had tried to see Roosevelt and failed and that Roosevelt had gone a couple of hundred miles out of his way to get in touch with Jeb. It was not likely that Uncle Jeb would be dazzled by the formality of Mr. Temple's household.

Uncle Jeb, as he came to be known at camp, was given the title of manager. But he had no executive duties. He was more than the camp's manager, he was its spirit. I have seen a scout camp with a statue of an old pioneer on the camp grounds to convey the idea of scouting and outdoor life. But Uncle Jeb was the living embodiment of all these things; he wore a halo of tradition. It was a fine inspiration of Mr. Temple's, bringing this old scout to camp.

Uncle Jeb built log cabins and made trails and instructed the scouts in pathfinding and stalking. He taught them the Indian trail marks. He would send a boy off to go where he would in the forest, give him half an hour's head start, then take a party of boys and find him. He did this without the least trouble.

"Why didn't yer double on yer trail?" he would

demand of the astonished fugitive after running him down. "What'd I tell yer 'bout not steppin' on no twigs 'n' bustin' 'em?"

"You can't run without breaking twigs," the embarrassed boy would protest. "And anyway, if I doubled on my trail you'd trace me anyway; so what's the use?"

"Yer don't hev ter tech no trees, do yer?" the old guide would say, "'n' leave all yer duds hangin' on 'em like a ole wash hangin' out."

"You can't run in the woods without touching trees or even stepping on twigs," the poor victim would protest. "Anyway, it's no use trying to get away, not from you, *Jiminy Christopher!*"

What Uncle Jeb meant when he charged an unfortunate scout with leaving his duds hanging on trees "like a ole wash" was that the baffled youngster had left one strand of a fringe from his scout scarf on some obscure bramble bush.

"If yer decorate yer path like if a parade wuz comin' 'tain' no chore findin' yer, now is it?" Uncle Jeb would ask. "Here yer scares away a turtle what was settin' on a rock and I sees where the spot wuz he was a settin' on. Yer ain't reckonin' I was blind, wuz yer?"

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No, they didn't think he was blind, they thought he had eyes all over him. It was disheartening trying to get away from Uncle Jeb.

"Now, youngster, you try agin," the old man would say, "'n' remember you ain't diggin' a cut fer a railroad 'n' yer ain't layin' out no line o' march 's if yer wuz marchin' through Georgie. 'N' don't make a noise like yer wuz shoutin' the battle cry of freedom. 'Cause yer jes' scare the birds 'n' the turtles 'n' they goes 'n' tells on yer. Now you try once more."

But it would be just the same thing over again.

CHAPTER III

GOOD MAN FRIDAY

THE scouts liked to be with Uncle Jeb and help him, but they shared these enjoyments with other diversions, rowing, swimming, and visits to Leeds and Catskills where they conducted masterly assaults upon ice-cream parlors and frankfurter stands, and satiated themselves with movies.

But Westy Martin stuck and became Uncle Jeb's right-hand man. A score of enthusiastic scouts would help in the starting of a new cabin. But only Westy would remain till it was finished. A clamorous throng would start blazing a trail back into the mountains and for the first mile or two there would be more scouts to do the blazing than there were trees to be blazed. But at the point of destination it often happened that Uncle Jeb and Westy were the only survivors.

During this very summer, of which we have witnessed almost the final scene, Uncle Jeb was engaged

in making a continuous trail around the lake. This involved the building of log fords across inlets and a rough bridge at one point. The mountainside across the lake from camp was dense and precipitous and here the making of a real path was laborious. The gang of volunteer workers soon petered out, leaving only Westy and Uncle Jeb to fell the trees and pry up rocks. All the camp idolized Uncle Jeb, but Westy was his good man Friday.

So it was natural enough that Uncle Jeb should select Westy to accompany him on his visit to the old cabin in the Rockies, which had been his home, or rather headquarters, for so many years. And it was natural enough, too, that Westy (being the boy he was) had never dreamed of being chosen for this great adventure. Mr. Temple's announcement struck him dumb.

It is significant, I think, that the first thought which entered Westy's mind upon hearing Mr. Temple's sensational announcement, was the thought of how his father would react to these tidings of great joy. He hoped that Mr. John Temple, who could do all things, would carry his interest to the point of interceding in the Martin stronghold in Bridgeboro. Sunshine had burst upon Westy and dazzled him.

And then there was a shadow, a shadow of misgiving and apprehension.

But late as it was in the season something was yet to happen at Temple Camp destined to have an important bearing on Westy's future adventures. There was one boy in his troop, who occasionally accompanied him and Uncle Jeb in their work of carving out this long-needed and circuitous trail. This was Artie Van Arlen, leader of the Raven Patrol in his own troop. He was tall and likable and intelligent, a real patrol leader. His patrol was more than a group, it was a well-conducted organization. And he had made it so.

Unlike many of the camp group, Artie had not set out to help and then grown tired of it and plunged into other diversions. Sometimes, when he felt like it, he would go across the lake and spend a day on the steep mountainside helping Uncle Jeb and Westy. He never said that he would surely be there the following day. He did not seem to consider his status as that of a helper, though he did help. He frequently rowed or paddled across at noontime with hot lunch for the two steady toilers, and often on such occasions he would remain, clearing away brush and prying rocks out of the projected path. Uncle

Jeb liked him and found it pleasant when he took it into his head to hike around or row across.

Artie was rather amused at Westy's constancy to this arduous labor. But that was the kind of boy Westy was. He worshiped at the shrine of Uncle Jeb and was a model of devotion to his hero. Dogs of certain breeds are said to recognize but one master and companion. Westy was of that exclusive and devoted type. He renounced the camp life to be with this keen-eyed old hickory nut of the plains and the Rockies. Uncle Jeb could hardly have thought of any one else to make the trip to Montana with him.

It was a day or two after Mr. Temple's bombshell at the big "feed" in his honor that Artie rowed across the lake at noontime with some bean soup and hot muffins for the trail makers. They always took a snack with them and these luscious supplements to their cold lunch came as pleasant surprises.

CHAPTER IV

THE CAPTIVE

IF it was natural that Uncle Jeb should have selected Westy to accompany him to Montana, it seemed quite as natural that Westy should select Artie to be his companion on the big adventure. At camp it was taken for granted that he would do this, not only because Artie was in Westy's troop and the two were pals, but because Artie was often with Uncle Jeb, and was serviceable to him in many ways. He was a frequent if not a steady helper.

Since work on the new trail had progressed to the opposite side of the lake from camp, the toilers saw much of him. They would hear the steady clink of oarlocks as the boat approached the shore and then Artie's voice calling from below, "Are you hungry up there? Any big rocks that you can't handle? If so, say the word; now's your chance." Then he would come scrambling up, all out of breath, to where the work was going on. They enjoyed his visits. Everybody liked Artie.

On this occasion he tied the boat (it was impossible to draw it up because the shore was so precipitous) and started scrambling up with the pail of soup to where the trail was being cut along the lower reaches of the mountain. A narrow and irregular shelf of land was being utilized to carry the trail through this precipitous area.

"How's she coming?" Artie asked. "Here's some soup; I nearly spilled it. There's a boxful of muffins down in the boat—hot ones."

"I'll go down and get them," Westy said; "you sit down and rest. What you been doing all morning? I thought we'd see you sooner."

"Oh, swimming and playing basketball and reading," said Artie. "Boy, but you're getting along, hey?"

"I'll say so," said Westy. "What were you reading?"

"Oh, a book."

Westy laughed. "That's a wise crack. What kind of a book?"

"'Winning of the West,' by Roosevelt," said Artie, with a slight suggestion of embarrassment. "It's in the camp library. I just happened to pick one of the volumes up. That's so, when you write

to me from the Rockies, I'll know what you're writing about."

"Maybe I won't write you," said Westy rather mysteriously.

Uncle Jeb winked at Artie and all three laughed; Artie's laughter had that faint suggestion of embarrassment in it that had been discernible when he mentioned the subject of the book he had been reading. The fact is that Westy had every intention of asking Artie to share his great adventure with him, but he had said nothing about this. That was because the shadow of his father lay across the whole affair. He was a careful, thoughtful boy and he preferred not to say anything to his friend which he might have to unsay later. But just the same there was a tacit understanding (and Artie was a party to it) that these three would be the ones to visit the Far West. Perhaps Artie was a bit puzzled that Westy had not put his invitation into words. But he was just as sure of going as ever he had been sure of anything in his life.

To change the subject he laughed and said, "All right, go ahead down to the boat and get the muffins and look out you don't drop them coming up; they'll all roll back down into the lake if you do. . . . All

right to sit down on this rock?" he asked Uncle Jeb as Westy departed.

Uncle Jeb sat down on a log and opened the dinner pail which he usually carried with him.

"Some trail, hey?" said Artie, glancing about.

"Good 'n' plain so even boy scouts can foller it," said Uncle Jeb. "Westy wants street lamps onto it, but I says no, you youngsters can shout across ter camp if yer get lost."

"Oh, sure," said Artie, taking the gibe in good part; "but maybe a sidewalk would be good, hey? You like bean soup, Uncle Jeb?"

"I reckon," said the old scout.

Artie had leaned forward to pour some of the soup into the cover of Uncle Jeb's pail when he felt a stirring of the rock on which he was seated. It was hardly more than a tremor, but it was followed almost immediately by a more pronounced jarring. He thought and acted quickly. Jumping up he hauled a small log around and got it under the rock, thus steadying it in its precarious position on the hillside. Uncle Jeb hauled the log on which he had seated himself over to the rock to reënforce the prop that Artie had jammed under it. The heavy rock

stirred, then seemed to settle against this combined support and for a few seconds did not move.

"Guess she's all right," said Artie. "I prefer another seat though."

He was looking about for a place to sit down when he happened to glance down to the lake. To his surprise Westy was sitting in the boat his body turning and wriggling; he seemed to be intent upon some physical effort.

"Are you eating all the muffins?" Artie called.

"No, but my foot's caught under this plaguy stern seat," Westy called; "it's like a blamed old wood-chuck trap."

"Turn it sideways," Artie laughed.

"I did, also endways and upside down," Westy answered. "It's a puzzle. I'll manage it."

As Artie moved his position for the better enjoyment of Westy's predicament he saw that the rock which he and Uncle Jeb had wedged up was directly above the rowboat. He shuddered at this thought, but the rock seemed secure so he indulged himself in the pleasure of a few humorous taunts and bits of mirthful advice to the writhing captive. Then, suddenly, there was a crash, one of the logs went

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rolling down the hillside while the rock, still poised, trembled visibly. Then it moved ominously and some earth and small stones went out from beneath it, rolling away. It seemed to Artie that if he touched it or even breathed upon it, it would go crashing down to the lake. He held his breath, every nerve on edge. . . .

CHAPTER V

IT SHALL NOT PASS

"LOOSE the boat and push off if you can't get your foot out," Uncle Jeb called; "there's a rock——"

"I can't reach the rope," Westy shouted, not knowing his danger.

Artie did not pause to call to his friend. One fearful look at the big rock informed him that it was going down. It seemed pausing like a beast crouching, ready to spring. Frantically he ran down the hillside, stumbling, catching hold of trees, now on foot, now on hands and knees. He would do what he could do quickest, and that was to release the boat and get it out of the path of the threatening monster. So as not to lose a second's time he carried his opened scout knife between his teeth.

He was about half-way down and going backwards so as not to stumble when he beheld something which caused him to act like lightning. Evidently Uncle Jeb had been putting another support under the rock. He saw the old man jump aside

and heard him shout. He saw and heard in a panic of horror and did not know what Uncle Jeb said.

Artie was not conscious of thinking at all. He saw the boulder rocking, then saw it move and roll down a few feet and stop against a big tree. There it paused, balanced for two or three seconds. Artie saw Uncle Jeb run toward it, doubtless to try and hold it poised behind the tree. In a kind of trance he saw the old man hauling a log down to where that tree had momentarily blocked it in its crashing descent.

But Artie did not wait upon the issue of this almost hopeless project. Like a panther he was up a sapling, looking hurriedly about as he ascended, taking note of its position in relation to neighboring trees. He was so frantic with haste that he had not time to close his scout knife; he dropped it from his mouth and forgot it. Near the top of the young tree he began swinging and swaying to make it bend under his weight, but he had to climb almost to the very end of it before it would do this. Then it only bent part way over. But it split somewhere below him and let him down almost to the ground where it lay against the trunk of a larger tree.

Thus in a few short seconds, fraught with peril,

Artie had succeeded in doing just what he had hoped to do; he had laid a barrier, such as it was, across the path of the rock. Simultaneously with this lightning exploit the rock rolled aside the tree where it had caught and came crashing down against the fence which Artie had placed, as if by magic, in its path. Fortunately it had not gathered much momentum and the springy sapling bent to absorb the shock of impact, then held the boulder fast.

The human machinery which had wrought this sudden miracle was not to be seen. Amid the sparse foliage of the prone sapling Artie writhed in agony, his right leg caught between the sapling and the trunk across which it lay. The whole weight of the nearby rock which made the sapling a sort of lever, held that torn and bleeding leg as in a vise. Beads of perspiration stood on Artie's brow from the anguish he was suffering, and his hands were clammy. He saw Uncle Jeb hurrying past him down to the shore to rescue Westy and he said not a word. Then he saw the leaves near him change color, the whole world reeled, and oblivion came to relieve the torments he was suffering.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESCUER

RELEASED from the boat Westy looked up the hillside to where Uncle Jeb pointed. There was the boulder held fast in almost a bee-line above the boat. Its weight strained the prone tree and it loomed conspicuously thus held behind this supple barrier. It looked out of place there, almost as if a human being held it. Westy shuddered as he looked. The lightning-moving human machinery which had interposed this obstacle to the rock's descent was nowhere to be seen.

"She nigh on clipped yer," drawled Uncle Jeb.

"Where's Artie?" Westy asked.

For answer Uncle Jeb only started up the bank, Westy following silently. They found Artie lying where the prone sapling crossed the standing tree. His foot was caught as in a trap. He had brought the sapling down to this secure lodgment and it held him as securely as it held the menacing boulder. His

face was tense with pain, beads of perspiration stood upon his pale brow. He had regained consciousness and was aggravating the agony he suffered by raising his trapped body and trying to see the rock to assure himself that it was held fast.

"Oh," he said weakly, "you here—you—all right, Wes——" Then he fell back again almost fainting.

They pried the sapling away from the tree-trunk, releasing Artie's crushed foot, and as they did this the slight movement of the springy barrier gave the waiting rock the chance it wanted and it went crashing down to the shore and into the water.

That boulder has never been seen since. Its murderous escapade ended, it became a submerged and lesser peril in the concealing waters of the lake. You had better not chug around there in the camp launch except in the company of a scout who knows where that rock lies hidden. Once it ripped open the bottom of the little sailboat. And when the wind sweeps the water you may see, even from the camp across the lake, a little spray which marks the grave of Artie's rock, as they call it. They call that spray the dancing tenderfoot though some will point it out to you as the white devil. Anyway, keep away

from it if you are in a boat, for it has a jagged edge sticking up.

That rock did not terminate its brief mad career on earth without leaving a memorial of its murderous power. It crushed the rowboat into splinters as it struck the water and one of those bits of wood which drifted near to the launch that took the stricken hero and his friend across to camp, was picked up by Westy and kept as a souvenir of the near tragedy.

For a day or two it seemed that this bit of wood on which Westy carved the date of the affair might be a sad keepsake. Artie Van Arlen lay with a raging fever in the little camp hospital while the doctors considered whether the amputation of his foot would be necessary, and whether even that would save his life. But the danger which they feared as the sequel of his accident passed and in a week or two his parents, who had waited anxiously, took him home to Bridgeboro. Westy saw him lifted into Mr. John Temple's big car and saw the white face smiling wanly down at him, humorously, ruefully, as they lifted the bandaged foot up onto one of the small folding seats.

"Wonder how I'd look going scout pace now," Artie said.

Westy said nothing. He wished he was going back to Bridgeboro too. But that could not be for he was to help Uncle Jeb board up the cabins after the noisy throng had departed. He was looking forward to being alone for a few days with the old scout. They would talk about their big sojourn in the spring and he would ask for the hundredth time, "Are you sure there are still grizzlies there? And do you think we can start just as soon as my school closes?"

Yes, he wanted to stay for those few delightful post-season days in the deserted camp. It would be almost like the lonely life he was going to have a glimpse of in the far Rockies. *The far Rockies!* How that phrase lingered in Westy's mind! But he wanted to get in that big car and go back to Bridgeboro with his friend, his rescuer. And when the car had rolled away he felt lonesome and a little guilty, he hardly knew why. That was Westy Martin all over.

CHAPTER VII

WICKED MR. TEMPLE

WHEN Westy departed from Temple Camp leaving Uncle Jeb alone in his glory for the long winter, he was filled with thoughts of the far-off springtime which loomed up beyond the long, cheerless, intervening season of cold and waiting. He would have liked remaining in the deserted camp all winter with old Uncle Jeb and helping him with the winter "chorin'" with which the solitary old occupant always busied himself.

He burst elatedly into his home in Bridgeboro, New Jersey, on the evening before the day on which school opened, his duffel bag over his back, his face wreathed in smiles. His mother and his sister Doris had only that day returned from the mountains and their trunks cluttered the living room. There was a riot of embracing incidental to this family reunion. Ghostly sheets which had protected the upholstered furniture during the season of Mr. Martin's lonely occupancy were still in evidence and the paintings on

the wall were concealed behind these uncompanionable hangings. One of the trunks stood open with part of its contents pulled out and Westy sniffed the pleasing odor of apples, those souvenirs of vacation time which nestle coyly in the corners of homecoming trunks. The disused living room, bereft of all its familiar bric-a-brac had a musty odor.

Westy sat down on an unopened trunk and poured out his tidings of great joy. "You're a nice lot, you are, never writing me anything about my big award. You didn't say anything about it in your last letter, Mom; I guess you were too busy playing tennis, Dorrie. I should worry. Some work I've done this last week, *believe me!* I suppose you know I'm going to Montana next summer with Uncle Jeb and I'm going to live in his cabin in the Rocky Mountains and you can hear eagles screeching where that cabin is; you can hear grizzlies, too. And I can choose a fellow to go with me; that's what I get for helping Uncle Jeb all summer. Have you seen Mr. Temple, Dad? He can tell you all about it. Gee williger, I told in letters and you didn't even say anything about it. Didn't you get the letter I sent you up to Mountainvale, Dorrie? Talk about mountains! Why Mountainvale is—it's—it's only——"

"I did and I think it's perfectly glorious," said Doris, aged nineteen. "You know how it is, Wes, when you're up in the country, you just never write letters."

"She has a new beau," explained Mrs. Martin.

"Oh, what I know about you, Dorrie!" Westy teased in the overflow of his joy. "I should worry about letters. Anyway, I won't be here to kid you next summer. I bet you'll be glad of that. Did you can that Arnold fellow?"

"You shouldn't talk that way," said Mrs. Martin in mild reproof. "Mr. Captroop is a very nice young man and your father likes him. He's in the brokerage business in Wall Street and he's doing very well indeed."

"He's a right sort of a young fellow," said Mr. Martin, "steady and sane."

It was evident that these remarks of Mr. and Mrs. Martin were intended rather for Dorris than for Westy.

"It's nice to think he's not insane," said Doris.

"What's his name—Claptrap?" said Westy.

"You haven't asked about your friend, Artie Van Arlen," said Mr. Martin. "He had a very narrow escape from death up at Temple Camp. And so did

you, from all I hear. You didn't write us a great deal about that, Wes."

"I didn't want you to worry," said Westy, a trifle embarrassed.

The fact was that Westy had not in his letters depicted the affair of the rock in all its seriousness. Every opportunity for adventure that he had ever had had been wrenched from his father after a struggle in which Doris had boldly championed her brother and poor Mrs. Martin had been his gentler ally.

Mr. Martin believed in people, even young people, being "steady and sane" and he seemed forever haunted by the thought that scouting was something in which boys broke their necks and that camps were places where they contracted typhoid fever. You could not pry those ideas out of Mr. Martin's head with a crowbar. It was for this reason that poor Westy always skimmed lightly over his adventures and related the doings at Temple Camp with cautious reticence. But he might have known that the news of Artie's mishap would reach Bridgeboro before him.

"Well, my boy," said Mr. Martin, sensing the cause of his son's reticence and speaking mildly in

consideration of the boy's homecoming, "I think you should have told us the whole story."

"I don't see what Artie's accident has to do with Wes's going out to Montana," said Doris. "It wasn't a case of telling the whole story at all; they are two different stories."

"Well, then, I don't see why he didn't tell both of them," said Mr. Martin. "The Van Arlen boy had a close call from death while in company of this old man. From all I can gather Wes had a pretty narrow escape too—helping this old man. And this is the very same old man that Mr. Temple wants Wes to go off to the four corners of the earth with and risk his neck. It's very easy for Mr. John Temple to arrange for other people's sons' fighting Indians and all such nonsense and breaking their necks into the bargain. Mr. John Temple has no son of his own. Why, I thought all this dime novel hocus-pocus was put on the shelf long ago. Now here is Mr. John Temple filling boys' minds with all such nonsense and sending them off with some old fire-eater to the frontier of nowhere. The man's philanthropy has gone to his head. Here you are all home again, not three hours in the house, and Wes talking about going to some cabin or other out West

next summer when he ought to be thinking about school to-morrow morning. What boy is he going to take with him, I'd like to know?"

"I made up my mind. It's Artie," said Westy timidly.

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Doris; "he deserves it, for his heroism."

"Well, that isn't the way to reward him," said Mr. Martin.

"You might give him a lollypop," said Doris, winking at Westy.

"Well," said Mrs. Martin, putting her arm about poor Westy and speaking in her gentle way, "we're not going to quarrel about next summer the very first evening we're all together and have so much to tell each other; we're just going to forget all about it, dearie."

"I'll tell you one thing," exploded Mr. Martin, speaking to Westy, but *at* his daughter. "If Archie Captroop had gone shooting buffaloes when he was sixteen and got his head filled up with all this wild-west business he wouldn't be drawing forty dollars a week at Ketchum and Skinners in Wall Street now. There was none of this falderal when he was sixteen, and look at him now."

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"Picture him hunting buffaloes," Doris exploded mirthfully.

"Do you mean I can't go then?" said Westy.

"I mean you should settle down to school now," said his father not unkindly, "and forget everything else."

Mr. Martin was not as good a scout as his son. Westy was steeled then and there to hear the worst. But Mr. Martin had not the courage to tell him the worst. He would hem and haw and bluster all winter. But he had no intention of letting Westy go. He would talk about boys breaking their necks until the household would be weary of hearing him. By such talk he would take all the pleasure of going from Westy. Westy's hope and spirit would be broken instead of his neck. That was the way Mr. Martin worked.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

THE Martins, notwithstanding their moderate prosperity, kept no car. Because people broke their necks with cars. Likewise, notwithstanding their moderate prosperity, Westy was not going to go to college. Because he wanted to go in for football and in that way boys broke their necks. Mr. Martin was not a bad sort of man, he was just (as Doris said) impossible.

The first summer that Westy went to Temple Camp a solemn promise had been extorted from him that he would not go on the water. Adventure, particularly big adventure with moderate risks, did not fit into Mr. Martin's scheme of life. He called Tom Slade a daredevil. He was certainly not opposed to the moral side of scouting, he subscribed to all the scout virtues. But the adventurous side he could not contemplate calmly. He did not believe in boys going away from home. His idea of young

manhood was embodied in the person of Mr. Archibald Captroop.

Mr. Archibald Captroop was twenty-four and he never went without his rubbers when it rained. There was a young man for you! He did not sport negligee khaki and go without a hat as Tom did. He worked in Wall Street and commuted and earned forty dollars a week. He lived in Raleigh Park about five miles from Bridgeboro so it was something of a coincidence that Doris and her mother had met him at Mountainvale during the summer. Doris had played tennis with him. After the return of the Martins to Bridgeboro, Archibald proved a frequent caller, making the journey to and from Raleigh Park by the trolley. That was one thing Mr. Martin liked about him, he had no automobile.

Archibald had no attraction for Westy. He was pleasant enough and not unmanly, but he was a smug little business man before his time. Mr. Martin approved of his saving his money instead of buying a Ford and he liked him immensely. He thought that Tom Slade, assistant at Temple Camp, might take a lesson from this steady young commuter. Mr. Martin could not believe that helping to manage a camp was really a business. The idea that a man

could be a scout and guide in the silent places and call it a business was preposterous. To him old Uncle Jeb was a dubious character who had carried a gun, but never really had a business.

On his way home from school the next day Westy stopped up at the Van Arlen place. Artie was limping about, but getting better, though he was not to return to school for a week or so.

"I came to see you the first thing," Westy said; "I'm on my way home from school."

"I don't have to go, thanks to you," Artie said with his pleasant smile.

"Yes, I hear you say so," Westy answered. "A lot you have to thank me for. It looks even as if I can't pay you back like I meant to do."

"Pay me back? Did you have a good time up there alone with Uncle Jeb? I was thinking about you alone up there. I bet it was nice just the pair of you. Two's a company, hey? I couldn't do much else beside sit and read, so I was thinking of you."

"What were you reading?" Westy asked.

"Oh, wild-west stuff."

"Listen, Artie," Westy said. "I'll tell you now that you were the one I was going to ask to go out West with me. I guess you know that, don't you?"

"How should I know it?"

"Well, you just didn't let yourself think of it, but anyway, you were the one. The only reason why I didn't say anything about it up at camp was because—well, you know how my father is. I was kind of afraid all the time that maybe he'd say nix and I wanted for you not to be disappointed. I kind of didn't let *myself* think of it till I got back, but all the while I was a little sort of shaky about what he'd say."

"What did he say?" Artie asked.

"Oh, he's just sort of begun to say I can't go; I know how it'll be. It's all off and I suppose I have to write to Uncle Jeb. Dad says your folks wouldn't let you go either after what happened to you."

"Oh, yes, they would," Artie laughed; "they'd be glad to get rid of me, I guess. My father said when I—— He said how a soldier——"

"Yes, what did he say when you—— You asked him if you could go in case I asked you, now didn't you?"

"Well, yes, I did," Artie said, embarrassed, but still amused at himself.

"So you wanted me to ask you, you old——"

"Don't hit me on the foot," Artie laughed, as

Westy's arm was raised in good-humored menace; "any place except on the foot."

"Yes, and what about the soldier?"

"The soldier? Oh, yes, my father said there was a soldier who got wounded in eleven places and he was in six hospitals in France and he was gassed besides, and he got over all that and when he got home he slipped on the back steps and broke his neck. My father said it's just as bad to break your neck in one part of the country as another. That's what Pee-wee calls logic, hey? No, gee whiz, my father would be glad to see me go, my mother too. I know the cook would."

"That's what my father's always saying about breaking my neck," Westy said. "He let me go to Yellowstone that time because it was the Rotary Club and they're all business men. But he thinks Uncle Jeb is some old bandit, I guess. Anyway, it's all off, Art; he didn't exactly say so, but I can see it coming. Only I just wanted to tell you that you were going to be the one to go with me. Now that I know what's what I can tell you."

"That's all right, Wes," Artie said. "As long as you tell me that I'll admit I wanted to go. But I wouldn't go unless you did, that's sure. We should

worry, hey? Gee, it'll seem funny up at Temple Camp next summer without Uncle Jeb there. How's school anyway? Is Grouchy Gordon teaching the fourth grade yet?"

"Sure, and Four-eyes is teaching drawing yet, too."

"I thought she was going to get married," said Artie, carefully changing his position on the porch swing seat so as not to hurt his foot. "False alarm, I guess, hey? Don't move, there's plenty of room, only I have to be careful of my plaguy foot."

"Seen any of the fellows in the troop yet?" said Wes.

CHAPTER IX

FRIENDS

WESTY drew his legs up onto the seat, careful not to touch Artie's bandaged foot. And so these two friends sat one at either end of the seat facing each other and chatting. Artie was the one boy in all the troop whom it was impossible to quarrel with. He had almost a girl's delicacy and an amiability that made him likeable to every one.

"Yes, but you wanted to go all right," said Westy.

"What you don't get you don't miss," Artie said.

"Well, I'm going to miss it," said Westy sullenly.

"Well, what do you say we both miss it together?" said Artie. "Then we'll have some fun missing it. I dare say my mother will be disappointed; she's getting postcards from me out there already. Well, let's see. You were asking if I've seen any of the troop. Elsie Harris sent me up some jelly; the chauffeur brought it; I guess she wouldn't trust Pee-wee. Safety first, hey? Sure, all the troop have

been up. Mary Temple was here yesterday; she's in Barnard now. Say, Wes, do you know how Mr. Temple first got hold of Uncle Jeb."

"Sure, he was out in Montana."

"Yes, but do you know how he got in with him? Mary was telling me about it."

"They were surveying or something, weren't they?"

"Sure, they were surveying for a branch of a railroad through a pass in the mountains. Mr. Temple himself went out there when they got to the pass because he wanted to see that place with his own eyes. Boy, but it must be lonely out there!" Artie burst out laughing at the solemn stare of interest and disappointment on Westy's face. "Wait till you hear what I'm going to tell you," Artie added.

"You only make it worse," Westy said.

"I had to laugh at the way Mary Temple shuddered when she told me about it," said Artie, still laughing.

"Yes, and you wanted to go out there just as much as I did," Westy said. "Go on, what did Mary tell you?"

"I've got you interested, hey?"

"Will you go on and tell me?"

"Sure, but I can't tell you the whole thing, because it's a mystery."

"Yes, go on."

"All right," said Artie, "one, two, three, *go*. Mr. Temple went out to Montana to see the pass; it was all like a deep ravine through the mountains. That's the Continental Divide out there. From there if you don't look out you go rolling down into the Pacific Ocean, *kersplash*."

"Will you talk sense and go on?" Westy fairly pleaded.

Artie craned his neck under the swing seat and glanced inquiringly here and there. "Your father isn't anywhere around, is he? Because there's a peach of a place for breaking your neck out there. Well, Mr. Temple went out there——"

"You said that four times."

Artie continued, "He went to a large city with a population of thirty-two people in it—and two dogs. I think there was a cat too——"

"Will you *please*——"

"The name of it is Eagle City; I guess it's named after the Eagle Scout Award, hey? All right, I'll go on. Mr. Temple went there, there's a train stops there every Tuesday and a week from Friday——"

"You're worse than Roy Blakeley," said Westy.

"All right, he went to Eagle City," said Artie, pursuing his narrative more seriously. "That was as near as he could get to the pass by railroad. That's where he first met Uncle Jeb. Uncle Jeb was buying tobacco at the village store and Mr. Temple wanted somebody to guide him up to the pass; I guess it was about fifty miles. They told Mr. Temple that Uncle Jeb was an old trapper and a guide and a lot of things like that. That's how Mr. Temple got in with Uncle Jeb. Uncle Jeb said his cabin was up toward the pass, somewhere up that way, so anyway it wouldn't be out of his way if he guided Mr. Temple to where he wanted to go."

"Did Mary tell you that?"

"Sure she did," said Artie, "and there must be some reason why nobody at Temple Camp knows anything about it. Anyway, I never heard Mr. Temple or Uncle Jeb say anything, did you? So then Uncle Jeb guided Mr. Temple up into the mountains—oh, but it was wild and lonely! They stopped at Uncle Jeb's cabin, just where you and I were going to go——"

"Yes, go on," urged Westy.

"Then they went on up to the pass, but they couldn't find the surveyors anywhere. Uncle Jeb found marks that showed they had been there and he showed them to Mr. Temple. He found little holes in the ground that showed where one of those surveyors' instruments had stood, and they found footprints, and a place where a campfire had been, and a place where a tent rope had been around a tree—gee, I guess Uncle Jeb didn't miss anything. They kept following the pass where it led through the mountains and they found more signs, remains of fires and all like that, but they never found the surveyors and those surveyors were never heard of again—not to this day. Tell your father that!"

Westy stared. "You mean they never got any news about them at all, *ever*?"

"And there's something else too," said Artie.

CHAPTER X

OUT OF THE PAST

BUT Mary Temple did not reveal to Artie the full details of this tragic story. There was something about the expression on her father's face that had always lingered in her memory; an expression so fraught with anxiety and keen disappointment, that a lapse of ten years had not obliterated the impression one bit.

She was quite young then but she had not forgotten her father's evident apprehension for those lost men.

Her mother then told her in full how it had all happened and what a financial loss it had been to the railroad with which Mr. Temple was connected. It meant a terrific loss to him at the time, being one of the largest stockholders, but being the man he was he took his loss cheerfully, seeming to be more concerned with the surveyors' disappearance, than with his own losses.

So it happened that no one but the Temple family and Uncle Jeb Rushmore knew the true details of this unsolved mystery.

It seems that Mr. Temple undertook this trip to Eagle City for the sole purpose of looking over this mountain pass, that was to give way to modern engineering and serve its end as a branch line for the railroad.

The surveyors had secured a sort of agreement from one Ezra Knapp, a farmer, whose property ran parallel to Mr. Temple's and which he wanted to procure so that the thing could be accomplished by extending the branch line through the distant pass and so on down the ravine.

After the agreement had entered their possession the surveyors' wired Mr. Temple for one of his representatives to come without delay and close the contract.

He decided then to go himself, not only for the benefit of his fellow-stockholders but for his own personal satisfaction.

Arriving at Eagle City, he found to his dismay that there wasn't any hotel in the immediate vicinity.

The station agent directed him to the general store about procuring some conveyance to ride in to the

Inn, which was about fifteen miles distant and on the way to Eagle Pass, which was Mr. Temple's destination.

As he was strolling over leisurely, amusedly observing the quaint hitching posts outside, his attention was arrested by a picturesque figure emerging from the store.

Mr. Temple stood contemplating this young-old man, who was in the act of lighting a pipe as unusual looking as himself.

He judged him to be about sixty years of age, as his face was deeply lined, although he realized one could not tell definitely about that either, as the carriage and raiment of this strange figure bespoke the fact that he was ostensibly a trapper or guide and the outdoor life would in itself line his face indelibly, as a sequence of his continuous battle with the elements.

His hair was snowy white and two shrewd eyes of deep blue twinkled out from under heavy brows and lashes. A drooping mustache of pure white also marked a vivid contrast to his brown, leather-like skin. Withal there was a vivacity and good humor about him that was undeniably contagious.

Looking up he saw Mr. Temple standing there

watching him and with a genial smile of welcome on his face walked over.

"I take it yure a stranger in these parts!" he said, cordially shaking Mr. Temple's hand.

"Yes, I am indeed," Mr. Temple returned. "And with whom, may I ask, is it my good fortune to speak?"

"Me?" he asked, his face wreathed with the light of the noonday sun. "Why, I'm probably what you Easterners call Old Timer." He chuckled softly to himself.

"Well, well," Mr. Temple said laughingly. "Surely such an individual as you, should bear a name more in keeping with yourself."

"Yes, yes," he laughed heartily this time. "I wuz born to the name of Jeremiah Rushmore and they call me Jeb for short. All the folks hereabouts has allus called me Uncle. I'm Uncle to everybody and yit I hev'n't one relative in the world," he concluded.

"That, I should think," Mr. Temple remarked, "is rather a mark of respect."

"I s'pose so, stranger," he said more soberly, and then: "Who may you be, sir?" he asked respectfully.

Mr. Temple then proceeded to tell him, and of the nature of his visit and how he wanted a guide to take

him through the pass. He also told him that he wanted to get the agreement from his surveyors so that he could close the deal with Ezra Knapp.

"Wa-al," drawled Uncle Jeb, "I can guide yuh to whar yuh want ter go, fer I wuz jest on my way up to the Inn to take a look-in on my ol' pardner afore goin' home. So, you might jes as well come along with me, Mr. Temple."

And that was the way that Mr. Temple met Uncle Jeb Rushmore.

CHAPTER XI

THE LOST AGREEMENT

MR. TEMPLE jogged along with Uncle Jeb in a dilapidated buckboard, oblivious of any discomfort, for he was fascinated with this old scout's quaint views of life, and listened attentively to the reminiscences of his trapping days.

"Don't do much else now but chore aroun'," he said rather sadly. "Guess I'm a-gittin' too old!"

"Not at all," Mr. Temple reassured him.

"Wa-al, anyway I'm a figgerin' on givin' up my cabin one of these days," he said. "'Tain't jest the thing when a man gits so old ter live by himself, and my cabin's pretty fur frum the Inn."

"I'd very much like to see it," Mr. Temple remarked.

"Wa-al, sir, yure shure are welcome ter come and stay a piece with me."

"That's very kind, but I couldn't stay but one night with you."

"I'm right glad to hev yuh and I'll take yuh up and bring yer back so yer kin git to Ezry's place after."

By that time they had arrived at the Inn.

The next morning they started before sun-up, just Mr. Temple and Uncle Jeb, on foot, of course. The trail began at the foot of the mountain just back of the Inn. Along toward ten o'clock they came in sight of Eagle Pass, where the surveyors had met Uncle Jeb the week previous when he was on his way down to Eagle City.

"Said they'd be here when I come back this way," he remarked, "but I guess they hevn't been able to git as fur as this yit."

"I suppose not," Mr. Temple said. "You don't think by any chance we have missed them?"

"No, indeed," replied Uncle Jeb. "Thar's not a track o' them anywhere's!"

They finally came to a spot where a lake could be seen in the distance lying right in the center of the mountains.

Looking up, Mr. Temple noted two cliffs identical in appearance on either side of the lake.

"Twin Cliffs, I calls 'em," explained Uncle Jeb. "Jes' like twins excep' thet the one has a hollow underneath. Regular nestin' place fer eagles in the

winter and sometimes in the summer. Durn good place to keep away frum."

"I suppose so," Mr. Temple agreed.

Suddenly Uncle Jeb's eyes were fixed intently on the ground.

Then he pointed.

There was nothing so startling that Mr. Temple could see but a few small holes and some foot-prints here and there. Also, some blackened embers, evidently the remnants of campfires long since dead, that had been blown hither and thither by the mischievous summer breezes.

"What," Mr. Temple asked, "would that signify?"

"Them surveyors," Uncle Jeb replied with a rueful shake of his head. "They come as fur as here and they didn't go back and they didn't go on."

He was now gazing significantly up a trail that led up to the hollow that he had previously pointed out.

"Do you think by any chance they were up there?" Mr. Temple asked anxiously.

"Dunno," he replied, "I warned them not ter go, I know that! Thar's been a little landslide here since I passed and thet would cover up the tracks—if thar wuz any."

Mr. Temple looked and found that parts of the trail were indeed covered with sand and rock. Becoming alarmed he turned to Uncle Jeb searchingly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Temple," he said. "Yuh kin go up if yer want to, but I'm a-thinkin' yuh won't find nuthin."

However, Uncle Jeb led the way up the trail and, needless to say, they searched, they shouted and in a frenzy Mr. Temple rushed to a trail that ran back of the cliff, but to his distraction soon realized that it became impassable after a few feet and finally obliterated itself in the impenetrable fastnesses of the deep mountain forest.

"And so your father went on to Mr. Rushmore's cabin," said Mrs. Temple.

"Didn't he look in the hollow?" Mary breathlessly asked.

"Oh, yes, my dear."

"Did he succeed with Mr. Ezra Knapp then?"

"No, it was all futile."

"Why so, Mother?"

"He said he had changed his mind and refused to honor the agreement."

"How perfectly mean!" Mary exclaimed. "But

couldn't Father hold him to it after making such a contract?"

"Assuredly in any other case, but you see this was different."

"How so?"

"The agreement disappeared along with the surveyors!"

CHAPTER XII

MR. MARTIN'S ULTIMATUM

AFTER leaving Artie, Westy strolled home thoughtfully in the haze of an early fall afternoon. He was thrilled beyond measure and equally despondent at the same time, over the knowledge that he would never be able to see those mountain passes where the surveyors had met their doom.

He was sorry, of course, that such a calamity had befallen those poor fellows, but there was no denying, he secretly admitted, that it added still more zest and charm than before to that haven of Paradise in the far-off Rockies.

It was certainly an Eden-like temptation to poor Westy to have heard that story, for the more he thought about it, the greater his desire became to participate in the wild life for one whole glorious summer.

Still, he realized that some great good fortune would have to wave its fairy wand over the Martin

household to convince his respected father that he was able to take care of himself and come back safe from that hazardous wilderness.

"I want to go so much," Westy said half aloud, as he was mounting the steps of the house. "Gee whiz, I'd do almost anything to go."

"What were you saying?" asked Mr. Martin who had previously come home from business and was divesting himself of his topcoat and hat in the front hall. "Were you speaking to me, son?"

"No, Father," Westy respectfully answered. "I was just thinking of something."

"Well, my boy," he said firmly, "you must always do your thinking in the proper places. I noticed as I came along in the bus from the station that you barely escaped being run over. One of those fool-hardy speeders came rushing along without any regard to the privacy of your thoughts. There isn't any room in the world for dreamers, especially the business world. You must quit dreaming if you ever expect to make a mark for yourself in business when you get there."

"Well, I don't expect to get there," Westy whispered to himself.

"What was that you said?" Mr. Martin asked.

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"Oh, I said I don't suppose I get enough air," Westy replied, feeling absolved from his white lie immediately, when his mother came forward to greet him. She smiled knowingly at her son, thankful that he had evaded any unnecessary argument.

"Well, if you have been in school studying all afternoon it won't hurt you any. The more you study the quicker you'll get through and get to business like Mr. Captroop," Mr. Martin reminded him.

"Come now," Mrs. Martin interposed, "dinner is about ready."

Westy looked upon his mother at that moment as one might look on an angel of mercy, for she had saved him from listening to a prolonged discourse on the safe and sane business career for all young men and the many admirable qualities of the Hon. Archie Captroop.

But to Westy's dismay, the estimable Mr. Martin took up the conversation at the dinner table, where he had left off.

"As I was going to say before dinner," he began, "I think it would be a very wise plan for Westy to make the most of his next summer's vacation."

"How?" Westy hopefully asked.

"By getting something to do like most energetic boys would do, instead of running around wild the whole summer with some unknown Wild West-erner."

"But, Father," Westy, crestfallen, despairingly pleaded, "I was speaking to Art to-day and it seems that he was planning on me asking him to go. His mother and father had already given their consent."

"Really, my boy, that was quite a presumptuous thing for him to do considering that he had not yet been asked. Perhaps though, you had given him encouragement!"

"No, that's just it. I knew I wouldn't be able to go and that's why I didn't ask him."

"Then he was presuming," his father said. "Talking about the Rocky Mountains it reminds me that I was talking with Archie on my way home on the train and I was telling him about this idiotic thing that Mr. Temple had planned for you and this Rushmore man, and he thought, as I do, that it's a perfectly ridiculous idea for two such young boys as you and Artie Van Arlen to go in that wild country, accompanied only by this perfect stranger whom even Mr. Temple knows little about. Archie remarked that he thought perhaps he might take a

longer vacation next summer and visit the Rockies himself. A nice, steady young man like that is well deserving of some recreation when he works as faithfully as he does the year round.

"Now," Mr. Martin continued, "if a sensible person like Captroop was to accompany you, why I might make allowances!"

"That would be better than missing it altogether, Wes," his sister Doris remarked.

"It wouldn't be fair to Artie though, after him saving my life like he did," Westy chokingly remarked.

"It would be more fair to the boy not to ask him, after what has just happened, and allow him to take any more risks in your interests. You can go if you decide wisely and ask Archie; he can look out for you best. Think it over!"

That night as Westy lay in his bed the thoughts flashed like code messages in his brain and he wondered. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

WESTY MAKES A DECISION

Two weeks had passed by and still Artie was unable to return to school. His foot was slow in mending and he still limped about painfully.

"I ought to be able to get out by spring at least," he called cheerfully to Westy, who was on his way home from school.

"Aw, don't get discouraged, Art," Westy returned feelingly, as he walked up to the Van Arlen residence and seated himself alongside of Artie in the porch swing. "You'll be out before Thanksgiving, I bet."

"Gee, I hope so anyway!" Artie doubtfully exclaimed. "Still, I'd be worse off if I was dead."

"Now you're saying something!" Westy put in, feeling a pang of conscience, for before he had reached Artie's home he was wondering how he would tell him of the proposition his father had put up to him. It wouldn't be sporting to tell him now, he thought. It would be better not to tell him at

all—that is not until his foot was entirely better and by that time perhaps he would have considered the matter thoroughly and decide to the contrary.

Not that Westy had contemplated anything definite as yet. Oh, no! But he had pondered it over until he couldn't think of anything else and was at his wit's end between wanting to go and the debt he owed to Artie.

He thought as he neared home that it was a bit of luck that Artie had not brought up the subject.

That night, Mr. Martin again broached the conversation along those lines.

"Son," he said, looking straight at Westy and with decision, "you have until the end of this week to make up your mind as to whether you prefer going with Archie or staying home this summer."

"Yes, sir," replied Westy sadly.

"Archie has told me," Mr. Martin resumed, "that he will decide Sunday as to where in the West he wants to go. He's going to get some booklets from the different railroads and then he will start next week to make reservations."

"Why next week, when summer is such a long way off?" Westy queried.

"Why? Because, my dear boy, Mr. Captroop is

a very unusual young man and thoroughly conservative in everything he does. Consequently, he's not putting off until the last minute what can be done next week and, furthermore, he always makes sure of where and what he's going to do before he starts out."

"Quite a remarkable person," Mrs. Martin remarked with a hint of sarcasm in her voice.

Mother-like, Mrs. Martin resented Archie Captroop being held up as an example to her son, for his lovable romantic and non-conservative traits were the very things that endeared him to her most.

Doris Martin, who was expecting the cause of the discussion to call on her that certain Wednesday evening, entered the room.

"Well," she said, "I hope Mr. Captroop takes me somewhere this evening instead of sitting around buzzing like a stock ticker!"

"You ought to be thankful," said Mr. Martin, "that he saves his money instead of throwing it away on some senseless movie that doesn't teach you anything. My motto is never to spend your money on something that doesn't bring you a full return."

"Horrors, Father!" exclaimed Doris. "You talk like a confirmed moralist."

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The door bell rang its warning of Archie's arrival, so she hurried to the door.

"Do not speak about it to-night," Mr. Martin warned Westy. "It would be more proper for you to go to his house and extend the invitation—that is, if you have decided," he added meaningly.

The strains of some popular waltz were drifting in from the living room, so Westy knew it meant that Archie Captroop would add one more dollar to his savings account that evening.

He decided to go up to his room, as his mother was busily sewing and non-committal. She was heartily in sympathy with her son, but she dared not show it.

The first book Westy picked up in his room was the one Artie had been telling about and loaned to him two weeks ago. He had not read it before, for he thought it would only be adding insult to injury and also too tempting.

But he could not resist it this particular evening with the fate of this promised adventure lying in the hollow of his hand.

In the dark silence of his room some hours later he argued the point with himself, that he couldn't have much fun with that "Claptrap" guy if he did

go, for he'd probably want to sit around like some old lady and not want to do anything but read the whole time.

"Still," a little voice inside him whispered, "it's far better than staying home, isn't it?"

"I suppose that's right," Westy declared, weakening. Then feeling a little mean for giving voice to the thought he added: "I could ask Archie Saturday afternoon and I wouldn't have to say anything to Artie about it, for a while, anyway!"

So Westy made his decision.

CHAPTER XIV

VINDICATION

THE days succeeding were difficult ones for Westy's peace of mind. He even avoided passing Artie's house in the event that he would see him, and so be thwarted from his set purpose.

But Friday night came quickly and he went to bed feeling as though he was facing some terrible catastrophe on the morrow. His slumber was restless and broken throughout the night.

His mother allowing him the luxury of sleeping late on Saturday morning proved a boon to Westy on this particular day, as it prevented any meeting with his father at the breakfast table. That, he was thankful for.

Lunch time came and he ate in ominous silence. Then, as the clock ticked its way around to one o'clock and finally one thirty, he left the house with unwilling steps.

"I think you're just in time to catch the bus

Father's due on," his mother called after him, coming out on the porch.

"Archie may be on it too!" his sister Doris added, joining her mother.

"Uh huh!" muttered Westy.

"What a funereal expression, when he ought to be tickled that he got Father to relent this far," Doris remarked to her mother.

"I know, my dear, but your brother feels that it is a breach of honor to slight Artie and I'm rather in sympathy with him. Still, I suppose, one must be optimistic and think it is all for the best."

Westy had reached the corner by this time and looked down the street before turning. The bus that he was to take stopped directly opposite Artie's house, but as there was still ten minutes to the good he decided he would wait where he was until he saw the bus coming.

He kept consoling himself that it was the better way not to have to face Artie just now. Leaning against a telegraph pole, he tried to whistle softly, but the notes sounded hollow and false. Now and then he would step out into the street looking for the bus, although he knew it wasn't yet due.

At this one instance, while he was gazing down

the long, paved roadway, a figure emerged from one of the houses and limped painfully down the stone walk. Westy dared not draw back or run, as much as he would have liked to, for he knew that it was Artie, and he also knew that Artie had recognized him. There was a lump in his throat as he saw with what effort Artie was hobbling along to meet him half way. He felt despicable as he smiled to this brave pal of his, by way of greeting.

"'Lo, Wes, old top," Artie said cheerily. "I was just going to try and make it to your house when I saw you. Wondered what happened you haven't been around. Been sick?"

"Well, y-y-yes!" Westy lied, flushing with embarrassment for doing so.

"Oh, I say, but I'm sorry! Feel better now, huh? Were you coming to see me too?"

"Yes—that is—first I was, but I didn't think I'd have time. Going to take the bus to Archie's. Invited there this afternoon," Westy said, and then to relieve the pounding around his heart: "Don't feel keen about going, though."

"I can imagine," Artie said with feeling, "but it'll do you good if you've been sick to be quiet for a while. You better cross now, Wes, I think I hear

your bus coming now. See you later. Wait! Look! Whassa matter with it?"

The bus came lumbering down the street pell-mell and careened from one side to the other like a drunken man.

The two boys could see, even from a distance, that something had evidently happened to the driver, as he had slunk down in his seat and his head hung over the wheel.

The huge car was running wild!

"My Father!" Westy cried. "He's in it!"

"Maybe you can——" Artie yelled as Westy ran toward the center of the road.

"Yes, maybe I can!" Westy's voice could hardly be heard above the cries of the few pedestrians in the street and the frenzied shouts of the passengers within the bus.

Westy then gauged the distance from where he stood and then backed over to the curb. With a rush it came directly toward him, heading straight for the large elm tree at his back. He must avoid that at all costs, he thought.

The door of the bus was open, the weather still being mild; so Westy jumped blindly! Just making the step he reached across the inert form of the

driver, whom he could tell at one glance was dead, grasped the emergency brake, and jamming his feet down taut and firm, stopped the car with a grinding shriek just at the edge of the curb.

There were only two faces that Westy could ever remember afterward in that near fateful bus. One was the white and trembling face of Archie Captroop, whose quivering lips revealed the fact that not only had he lost his head in that near-tragedy but also his nerve. The other face was that of his father, lying prone upon the floor, the blood streaming out of a deep gash in his scalp and entirely covering his head.

With a cry of distress Westy knelt beside him and spoke to him tenderly, but there came no answer to his earnest pleadings.

He lifted his father's head up gently and with a sob that bespoke his anguish realized at once that his father was unconscious, probably dying.

CHAPTER XV

A LIFE IN THE BALANCE

THE House of Martin during the next few hours was the scene of much anxiety and despair.

A white-capped nurse was passing in and out of the sick-room, while Westy and his sister sat on the stairway, apprehensive each time that she had come to tell them the worst.

Mrs. Martin, sitting faithfully by her husband's side, dry-eyed, seemed shaken with grief inwardly and her white face looked haunted with lost hope.

Four hours had passed and still he had not regained consciousness. The doctor was standing, silently gazing down into the darkened street. He turned back toward the bedside and Mrs. Martin, watching his mobile face intently, thought she detected the faintest glimmer of hope pass across his features.

"Another half hour will tell," he told her, "and if he lives he'll have his son to thank not only for his

life, but for the half-dozen others he saved from being dashed to pieces."

The doctor, it seems, had witnessed the accident, and sang Westy's praises for many a long day after.

Archie had left to go home two hours before, saying he was too upset from the ordeal to stand the suspense of waiting. They couldn't seem to get a coherent account from him as to how Mr. Martin injured his head. He said he couldn't seem to remember, he was so excited, except that he saw him fall just as Westy jumped on the steps of the run-away bus.

So Archie went and no one cared to detain him.

Twenty minutes, then a half-hour, went by that seemed to the waiting trio like years.

The nurse, reëntering the room, took the sick man's pulse and nodded to the doctor who was standing close by.

Slowly but surely Mr. Martin opened his eyes, smiling rather wanly at his wife, who was now bending eagerly over him. She was afraid to speak lest he should fall back again into that coma.

The doctor, suspecting her fear, spoke softly. "He'll be all right now, providing he has nothing to

excite him. Perfect quiet and rest will do the trick. I'll be back in a few hours!"

The nurse went out of the room with him and Mrs. Martin clasped her husband's hand in hers, fighting back the tears of joy that were continually overflowing. The door opened once again, but this time it was Doris and Westy whose youthful figures were framed in the doorway.

Mrs. Martin put her finger to her lips and motioned for them to come.

"That's all right," Mr. Martin spoke weakly. "I want to talk to that boy of mine!"

"Not now, dear," Mrs. Martin said almost pleadingly. "I'm afraid you're not quite up to it just yet."

"Rats!" he replied firmly this time. "Takes a whole lot to kill me, I guess. Westy, come here!"

"Yes, Father," said Westy, with tears brimming in his large eyes as he knelt once more by his father's side.

"My boy, you're a real he-man, do you know that?" he said, raising his hand from under the coverlet and placing it on Westy's bowed head. "I'm no end proud of you, lad!"

"M-mm," was all Westy could say.

"After what I witnessed to-day—is it still to-

day?" he asked, turning his head toward the window where the shades were now drawn.

His wife nodded.

"After what I witnessed to-day," he continued, sheer gratitude inflecting his voice, "I'm quite sure that there isn't a boy alive who is any better able to take care of himself than our boy. Isn't that right, Mother?"

Mrs. Martin smiled her assent.

"And so," he went on, "the only way I can repay this modern hero of ours is to grant him the wish of his heart's desire."

"I don't wish to be repaid, Father. It was no more than I should have done," Westy said, vainly trying to conceal his embarrassment.

"Oh, no, son, that wasn't any mere duty you performed on my behalf and also the others; it was true courage, the stuff that one rarely sees displayed so splendidly. I wouldn't have believed it was in you really!"

"I've always tried to tell you that!" Mrs. Martin exclaimed with a touch of maternal pride.

"But, Father," chimed in Doris, clasping her father's other hand, "just what was it that happened to you?"

"It's not much to tell, Dorrie, it all happened so quick. Archie and I were sitting together in the back seat of the bus chatting, after we left the station. We had gone but a few blocks when I happened to notice that the driver didn't stop as we passed by River Street, and I thought it was strange, as a lady waiting there had hailed to him, but he seemed to take no notice of her. Suddenly, as I was just about to mention it to Archie, the poor fellow collapsed, and of course we were all thrown into a panic. No one seemed to know what to do to stop it, and by that time we were running wild. Then, I chanced to look ahead and there was Westy standing in the middle of the street waving his arms frantically. Naturally I forgot all else and got up out of the seat intending to start for the front of the bus. Previously we had all been seated, as the car, swerving from one side of the street to the other, prevented us from keeping on our feet. Archie, meanwhile, had been quaking with fear and I did my best to calm him, but, as I was saying, when I saw Westy I got up and Archie evidently misinterpreted my intention for he arose also. I suppose he didn't know what he was doing—panic-stricken, I guess, but he pushed me aside to try and get to the front of the bus first and

in doing so knocked me backwards, throwing me against the rear window. My head must have gone clear through it, for I could hear the crash of glass and then I seemed to strike something sharp. I don't remember anything after that."

"Miss Doris Martin, a Mr. Captroop is downstairs and wishes to see you!" the nurse said, entering the room.

"If you'll be so kind, Miss Treat, will you tell him I'm not at home and that my father is doing nicely?"

"Surely, I'm only too glad to," the nurse replied, "and now if you will let Mr. Martin rest for a while, you can see him again in the morning."

"Before you go," Mr. Martin said, "I want to tell Westy that he can do as he wants to, providing he comes back next fall determined to get through school as quick as he can and get to business instead of wasting his summers hereafter."

"Do you mean, Father," Westy asked breathlessly, "that I can ask Artie? Do you mean that?"

"Something like that," Mr. Martin answered.

Westy grasped his father's hand and impetuously stooped and kissed him. Rushing out of the room and down the stairs he flung his coat and hat on in the hall and hurried to tell the news to Artie!

CHAPTER XVI

THEY'RE OFF

THERE wasn't a pair of feet on the paved sidewalks of Bridgeboro that night that stepped any lighter than Westy's. He seemed to be nearing Artie's house on air and there were a thousand tiny voices all singing inside him at once.

The night felt frosty and damp after the rather warm afternoon, but as far as Westy was concerned summer dwelt within his heart eternal.

Ringling the bell he waited, excitement and joy kindling his cheeks with radiance. Mr. Van Arlen opened the door.

"Where's Art?" he asked, stepping inside quickly.

"How is your father?" Mrs. Van Arlen called, hearing Westy's voice.

"Getting on fine," Westy answered with gladness in his voice. "Where's Art?"

"You're a fine boy, Westy," Mr. Van Arlen now remarked, as though he hadn't heard Westy's ques-

tion. "I hear the bus company are going to reward you for your bravery and no doubt you'll get a medal from your troop for such heroism."

"Yeh? Has Art gone to bed?" he queried, indifferent as to what rewards or medals he might get and intent only on bearing the glad tidings to his friend.

"Here I am, Wes," Artie shouted from the living-room. "What's all the excitement?"

"Gee whiz, Art, gee whiz! Bet you can't guess?"

"Quit keeping me suspended!" Artie laughed. "What is it?"

"We're going!"

"Where?"

"Why, you dumb-bell! Where would we be going?"

"Wes! You don't mean——"

"Sure."

"Honest and truly?"

"Cross my heart'n hope to die if we're not. Father just gave his consent."

"Oh, boy, but we're two lucky guys!"

"I should say you are," Mr. Van Arlen interposed, as glad as the boys themselves.

"And say, Wes," Artie broke in again, "the doctor

told me to-night I'd get to school in two weeks. Good news comes in bunches, eh?"

"Righto! I'll go home now and write to Uncle Jeb right away."

"Sure thing."

"Well I'll be going along, Art. S'long!"

"G'night!"

The winter came and dragged along interminably for the two boys. They counted the months and talked of little else in their moments of recreation.

The months finally became counted in weeks and the weeks into days, until one morning Westy received a letter from Uncle Jeb telling them to leave Bridgeboro the following week and meet him at the Grand Central Station in New York.

The eventful day was glorious with sunshine and fragrant with the perfume of budding trees and flowers, as Westy and Artie said their final good-bys.

Mr. Martin soberly commanded Westy what to do and what not to do, but the chirping of the birds in the neighboring trees seemed to tell Westy that he could afford to listen, for there ahead of him was the thrilling promise of real adventure.

Their trip to New York was uneventful and when they arrived at the Grand Central Station, the picturesque figure of Uncle Jeb stood out individually amidst the hustling throng. His very presence seemed to breathe clean, fresh air into that artificial atmosphere.

He caught sight of the boys almost at the same time they saw him. With his familiar smile of welcome he joined them.

"Howdy, boys! I reckon now we're jest about on time. Are yuh both ready to leave?" he asked, laughing heartily.

"I'll say so!" they answered unanimously.

When the "all aboard" was called and they felt the tug of the engine making ready to pull out, Artie and Westy looked into one another's faces beamingly.

I've always thought since, it would be rather a difficult thing to decide, as to which one of the boys looked the happiest.

CHAPTER XVII

"HILLS"

THE sun was hardly more than a perceptible blur behind the vast wall of mountains surrounding Eagle City when Westy, Artie and Uncle Jeb alighted from the Pullman train onto the station platform.

They were fatigued after their long and tiresome journey and followed Uncle Jeb wearily over to a rather dilapidated looking Ford, ostensibly the only taxicab the town afforded, which was to convey them to the Inn.

The rickety little car started off with a snort as they seated themselves in the springless seat. Minus shock absorbers and all, they gave themselves up to the clear cool wind blowing gently in their faces as they sped along the rough, unpaved roads.

Time itself seemed to stand still as they flew past little unpainted shacks and makeshift abodes, for there wasn't any Super-Seven that covered the ground any faster than this rattle-box of a flivver. Here and there they would catch a glimpse of some

pretentious looking ranch-owner's home, until gradually civilization was left behind and became no more than a speck on the horizon.'

They were in the foothills now, with the towering Rockies on all four sides. It seemed to Westy, who was dexterously trying to keep his seat with the others, that they would surely run clean into the mountain-side whichever way the driver might turn. He confided as much to Uncle Jeb who smilingly remarked: "Got more 'n ten mile to go yit, afore we come to the Inn and after thet it's a couple more 'til we hit the trail into the hills."

It amused Westy and Artie considerably to hear Uncle Jeb refer to that majestic pile of rock and pine forests tipping against the sky-line, as the "hills."

"'Tain't high here, boys," he said, divining their smiling silence. "Wait'll we cross Eagle Pass to-morrer, this side o' my cabin! Them's what yuh call mountains over there shure 'nough." This with a finality that did not leave the boys in any doubt as to what they were to expect.

By this time, they were swiftly approaching the picturesque little Inn that nestled with such an air of peace and contentment against the lordly mountain-side.

CHAPTER XVIII

"SILENT" OLLIE BAXTER

LATE twilight had thrown a gorgeous cloak of purple mist over the whole surrounding country as the trio of weary scouts ambled up the stone steps into the long, low room which served as a lobby, dining-room and ballroom all in one.

There were few balls or parties held in that rustic Inn except on festive occasions, such as weddings, etc., when the farm and ranch folk would gather there.

"Ol' Pop Burrows," pioneer and crony of Uncle Jeb's, who owned the place, greeted them with all the warm hospitality so characteristic of the real, honest-to-goodness Westerner.

By the time Westy and Artie, with their miscellaneous baggage, had been shown to their room, the aroma of a delicious dinner was emanating from the kitchen below them.

"Boy, but that smells good!" Westy exclaimed, in the process of washing up.

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"Now, that's what I'd call an instance of mental 'telegraphy,'" Artie remarked, smiling through the folds of a face-towel.

"You mean mental telepathy," said the ever-serious Westy.

"You go to the head of the class for that," laughed Artie. "Whatever you call it, it smells good."

"Let's snap into it! I'm as hungry as the proverbial grizzly," Westy said, walking toward the door.

"You've got nothing on me and I'll be right with you, Wes."

They descended the stairs and found Uncle Jeb already awaiting them. He led them to a table at the far corner of the room where the steaming food was being placed by a little wizened-looking man, whose agile step and manner belied somewhat the immobile expression of his face.

Indeed, he was an unusual looking man; swarthy skin with "the smallest eyes." As Artie remarked, "You'd almost wonder how he could see out of them."

"Evidently, no one could say they were the windows of his soul," said Westy. "They're not big

enough for a fellow to tell whether he's looking your way or not."

"Maybe he hasn't any soul," put in Artie, who afterward had good cause to remember this jesting remark.

"Now, boys," drawled Uncle Jeb, who had been eating in silent contemplation while Westy and Artie were talking, "you hain't doin' Ollie Baxter justice when yuh talk 'bout him thet way. He wouldn't hurt a flea, 'n I guess he's shure 'nough got a soul, fer he never says nuthin', jes cooks fer Ol' Pop, waits on table when them tourists come in summer, 'n does all the chores thet's asked o' him on the place. I reckon thar hain't a man livin' thet minds his bizness like Ollie Baxter; no, sir!"

"Well, pardner, I reckon yuh're dead right," chimed in Ol' Pop, as he seated himself by the table. "He came strollin' in here one day nigh onto ten year ago. He sez to me as quiet like as if he had allus known me: 'Pop,' sez he to me jes like that; 'Pop, I'm a furriner roun' these parts, 'n jes by accident I heerd down in Eagle City thet yuh wanted a man to do chores. So, I thinks to myself thinks I, I'm the man he wants, so if yuh don't mind I'll

take it pronto!' Jes like thet he talked, quiet like, but to the point; nuthin' fancy."

Ol' Pop Burrows, like many of his type, manipulated his food by means of the knife with all the dexterity of an expert. As he talked between bites, he would wave the implement in mid-air, as if to express himself more fully to his interested listeners. Then, with a swoop (that would do justice to only a bird of prey), he would descend upon his plate, scoop up the proper amount that the knife would hold, and presto—it had disappeared. The conversation would then be resumed.

To Artie and Westy, who were amazed at this work of ingenuity, each recurrence made them marvel more, and gave them a secret thrill to be in company with these two old scouts of the Rockies. In fact, late that night, when they were in bed and exchanging confidences, they both agreed it must have been great to have lived in those days that Uncle Jeb and Pop Burrows had lived in as boys; when mothers and fathers didn't keep tabs on a fellow's table manners and things like that.

"Just think," said Westy, "all boys had to do in those ~~days~~ was to fish, hunt and eat with their

knives, no sisters to boss a guy around and tell you what to do as if they're your own mother."

Artie agreed to this most heartily. He also expressed his contempt of our present-day civilization in a few words that did not leave any doubt as to his feelings in the matter.

"Anyhow," remarked Artie with a ring of enthusiasm more pronounced in the darkness, "we can do as we like all summer and that's something. That is—we can do as Uncle Jeb does, I mean."

"Bet your life," said Westy. "Gee, I can hardly believe we're here, Artie, can you? Pinch yourself and see if it's true."

"Don't hafta, when I get a whiff of that ozone coming in the window. Guess the Rockies is the only place in the world where the air smells like this," Artie murmured, his voice drifting sleepily into space.

"Uh huh!" said Westy in a monotone. "Gosh, but I'm tired, ain't you, Art?"

"Sure!"

"G'night, Art!"

"Night, Wes!"

Uncle Jeb, passing by their door into his own

room, called good-night and reminded them that they were to make an early start in the morning.

They answered him drowsily and sleep must have overpowered them before the echo of their voices died away in the night. The moonlight, streaming in through the open windows on the two sleeping forms, transformed the room into a magic fairyland of dancing silver shadows, giving the whole an air of profound tranquillity.

CHAPTER XIX

UNCLE JEB SOUNDS A WARNING

BEFORE the great golden orb of light had shown itself behind the "hills," Uncle Jeb hailed the boys with a cheery good-morning.

They stretched themselves with an affected weariness and bounded out of the bed to make ready for their short journey to the cabin.

Uncle Jeb had already started to breakfast when they arrived downstairs. Ol' Pop joined them shortly and they consumed the hearty food with much gusto.

"Silent" Ollie, as Westy now called him, was hustling back and forth from the kitchen attending to the wants of the hungry quartet.

His head was sparsely covered with iron-gray hair and his thin colorless lips scarcely deviated an eighteenth of an inch from his mouth, except to answer yes or no. He was exceptionally slight of build, but still, one seemed to gather a suggestion of muscularity about him.

At all events, he was a source of interest to the two boys, notwithstanding his disinclination to talk to them.

He had come from the kitchen bearing a steaming, savory pot of coffee. At that moment, Ol' Pop Burrows was relating all the events and happenings that had taken place around while Uncle Jeb was East at Temple Camp. He remarked quite casually that he had done a "fair to middlin' " business in the little Inn that previous summer.

"Gets better every year," he said. "Expect to take in more'n ever this year; yes, sir; it gets better every year," he repeated more to himself than to his listeners.

Artie was gazing with rapt attention at this old timer, but Westy's gaze was centered on Ollie. It had been centered there ever since the conversation started, for the observing Westy had caught a faint expression of real human interest on the stony countenance of Ollie Baxter. It was barely perceptible, but Westy saw, and having seen remembered. . . .

The sun was now well out of its hiding-place behind that gigantic curtain of rock, and the dew was glistening in its crags and crevices like so many millions of precious diamonds.

Uncle Jeb, Westy and Artie had bid farewell to Ol' Pop Burrows and his retinue (Ollie) and turned their steps still further westward.

Their equipage consisted of two old mules that carried their week's supply and baggage—and themselves.

The journey was not such a long one, but precipitous, Uncle Jeb informed them in his drawling manner. He led the way through narrow trails, resplendent with the verdure of late spring, sometimes ascending the craggy slopes, sometimes descending. At last, after a few hours' of steady going, they came to an open space reminding one of a deep bowl in the center, where a mountain lake peacefully reposed. Before them and behind them the mountains loomed high and imposing in their majestic serenity.

As they were gazing in awe and admiration at this scenic wonder, Uncle Jeb directed their attention high above them, where the steady flap-flap of a mountain eagle's wings sounded like the drone of an aeroplane in the distance. A terrific screech broke the quiet as another one approached—evidently its mate. They circled around high above the lake and then disappeared among the crags and fastnesses of mountain forests.

"Thar hain't a bird I know of thet I like to leave alone better 'n an eagle," said Uncle Jeb with a speculative gesture toward the spot where they had disappeared. "Right nasty customers when they're cornered, yuh kin depend on thet. Fight to the last ditch fer their young 'uns."

"Where do they nest, Uncle Jeb?" questioned Westy, his interest now thoroughly aroused.

"Wa-al," answered Uncle Jeb, "I reckon yuh cud find out soon enough if yuh set by the lake very long. I'm a-goin' to warn ye, both of ye, if yuh finds out, steer clear, or yuh'll git the worst of the bargain."

Uncle Jeb never wasted words and the boys were well aware of it, so did not ply him with idle questioning. They were both burning with curiosity to ask him of Mr. Temple's visit with him so long ago and the story of the surveyors; but they felt sure now, because of his reticence on the subject, that it must be a matter of confidence, so they left it for some more propitious occasion.

So they did not bother him with the whys and wherefores of the habits of the eagles, for they had too much respect for Uncle Jeb's knowledge of the mountains, its inhabitants and their respective habits.

His was a knowledge, so the boys contended, that far surpassed anything one could learn in school.

Westy and Artie, following Uncle Jeb around the lake and up the trail on the last lap to the cabin, walked silently and serenely, confident in the superior knowledge of Uncle Jeb Rushmore.

CHAPTER XX

WESTY MAKES A DISCOVERY

It was well along toward mid-morning, when they came in sight of Uncle Jeb's picturesque cabin almost hidden among the giant pine trees. It stood there solitary and imposing, bespeaking character, such as only one like he himself could give it.

It has often been said that a man's house is but a reproduction of his life, and nothing more true could be said of Uncle Jeb's wilderness cabin.

The door was bolted from the outside to keep away intruders of the forest, but always open to the weary stranger.

As Uncle Jeb opened the door, the boys could see at once that the place was meticulously clean, notwithstanding its long state of unoccupancy.

There were bear skins covering the floor and walls, and the furniture consisted of a table and some chairs carved out of the productive forest trees. There was a stove in the back where some wood was lying beside it, all cut and ready for use. A few

pictures hanging on the walls were distinctive of the good taste of this hardy mountaineer. The most prominent of these pictures was one of the late President Roosevelt, autographed. Uncle Jeb was very proud of this and did not conceal the fact.

There were no beds in this little quaint cabin, just four bunks built along the walls like berths.

After unpacking their belongings and helping Uncle Jeb put the place in order they all set to, getting the noon-day meal with zest.

Artie stayed in the cabin peeling the potatoes, while Westy went with Uncle Jeb to fetch some water from the neighboring brook back of his place. He told Westy that this cheery little brook tinkled its silvery way down into Eagle Lake.

"More trout 'n you could ever eat in a lifetime, here in this brook, son," Uncle Jeb told Westy. "Kin hear it most any hour of the night when everything is quiet. Best company any one would want."

Westy could well believe this, for the gurgling water, plashing down the rock-ribbed mountain side on its journey to Eagle Lake, was heard quite distinctly above the chirping birds and the screeching of little forest folk even at noonday.

After lunch was over, Uncle Jeb told them they

were at liberty to do as they wanted, for it was quite late in the day to do any exploring. He promised them, however, that he would take them on a hike the following day over some all but forgotten Indian trails.

Uncle Jeb seated himself quite comfortably outside the cabin with his pipe and Artie decided he would stick around also and read.

But the restless Westy, being the true scout he was, strolled off into the forest to do a little exploring on his own.

He walked along noiselessly, striking into a trail that wound its precipitous way up through the mountains still further. Then suddenly it seemed to merge itself into another trail, one part running on down to the lake and the other part running straight up to a formidable looking cliff directly opposite the one that they had seen the eagles disappear from earlier in the day.

Looking skyward, Westy observed that the sun was on the decline, but he figured he could make the top of the cliff and get back by supper time.

After a strenuous climb he came at last to the top of the cliff that seemed to jut far out into space. Earlier in the day, when Westy had looked up-

wards from the lake, it had occurred to him then, that perhaps one could almost reach across from one cliff to the other. From below it really looked as though the two cliffs, jutting out on opposite sides, met in mid-air above Eagle Lake. But, as Westy scrambled out over the rocky precipice, he realized just how much the naked eye can be deceived by distance.

Sitting on an overhanging rock, he looked across and then below him. He smiled when he saw what a gap it really was that separated the two cliffs. And with a shudder as he glanced downward, he saw that he was sitting directly above the center of the lake.

"Whew," he said aloud, "that's some drop if any one should ask me. Wait'll Artie sees it from here."

Then his attention was directed elsewhere, for from the distance came that droning sound now familiar to him. Suddenly he saw an enormous eagle descending (it almost seemed to come from heaven) and heading straight for the cliff opposite.

In a second another appeared joining the first one and they both disappeared as before behind the rocky cliff.

"There," said Westy half-aloud, "is their aerie and that means we are to keep away from that cliff!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE MYSTERIOUS HOLLOW

As he came into the open clearing by Uncle Jeb's cabin, Westy could detect the smell of bacon frying crisp and brown. Uncle Jeb hailed him and good-naturedly asked if he had any trouble getting back.

"Not so's you could notice it," he retorted.

While they were eating supper he related to them his experience and discovery of the afternoon. Uncle Jeb listened intently and then cautioned the boys to be careful about going so far out on the cliff.

"Not only thet," he said, "but yuh can't allus tell when them birds'll take it into their fool heads to make a new nest on t'other side where Westy wuz."

They sat in breathless silence, as he told them many thrilling and hair-raising adventures of his boyhood days.

"What do yuh boys say we turn in now?" he concluded.

Indeed the boys did not need coaxing to turn in,

for their eyes were already heavy with weariness and want of sleep.

They tumbled into their respective berths with goodwill and soon Sleep drew her mystical curtain about them and their first night in the bosom of the Rocky Mountains.

Uncle Jeb and the boys generally made a weekly visit to the Inn. As he and Ol' Pop had much to say to one another as a rule, Artie and Westy would try to kill time by getting Ollie to talk. Between them they would hurl a veritable barrage of questions at his poor, meek-looking head, until one would imagine he would answer, if only to silence them.

Nothing, however, seemed to perturb his calm in the least. He was utterly unaware that any one was speaking at all, except for an occasional flicker of interest, visible only when Ol' Pop's name was mentioned.

On this particular early summer morning, Artie and Westy were sitting on the spacious porch reading some letters from home and many from Temple Camp, when Pop Burrows remarked he had "fetched them from town nigh onto three days ago. Could jes' as well o' let Ollie take 'em up to ye, but I thinks to meself that you'd be down afore long.

"Ollie, he generally takes hisself off for long hikes in the afternoons. Sez he never gits tired o' climbin' the hills. When he fust came, Uncle Jeb used to say as how it was durn funny, a tenderfoot like Ollie never got tired o' climbin' the hills every afternoon jes' for pleasure. Well, after thet, I kinda feels Ollie out once 'n fer all. I sez, 'Ollie, how come yer so fond of roamin' the hills every day, you thet's a tenderfoot?' 'Well,' he sez to me, 'I been brought up in de city; never outside it till I comes here, and when me woik is done I likes to go off by me lonesome with me pipe and sit quiet, that's all.' Thet's all he ever told me about hisself," continued Pop, "no more 'n no less. After thet we never bothered him and he never bothers us." He looked toward Uncle Jeb as if for verification of his story.

Uncle Jeb nodded his assent between puffs of his pipe. Then he arose quietly as Ollie came around from the back of the Inn, leading the two mules who were bearing a fresh supply of provisions for the scouts.

Taking their leave of 'Ol Pop they were soon on their way, walking single file where the trail narrowed. Presently Westy called to Artie and told him of the word he had received from home.

They also talked of the news which they had heard from Temple Camp and this Uncle Jeb listened to with interest.

Roy Blakeley wrote that, as usual, Pee-wee Harris was doing good turns; that is, he started out to do them, but rarely accomplished his purpose without a series of mishaps intervening. "At any rate," Roy concluded, "we're not a bit envious of you fellows out there (Oh, no!) so long as we have Scout Harris to disturb the calm of a hot summer's day."

Just then they came out into the clearing by Eagle Lake and Uncle Jeb suggested that they sit for a while and rest, when their eagle friends announced their advent with a series of screeches.

Instead of disappearing beyond the cliff this time, one flew into a small hollow just underneath the precipice.

Before Artie could retract his words they were out: "Isn't that where the surveyors disappeared, Uncle Jeb?"

Uncle Jeb was quiet for a while but then finally he answered softly: "Yes, my boy, 'n I always figgered somehow thet the holler is responsible. I cudn't say jes' why I do, but still thar's no tellin' 'bout them spooky lookin' places after all!"

CHAPTER XXII

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

As they were nearing the cabin Artie called to Westy: "I'm looking forward," he said, "with delight to having Ollie bring our mail twice a week. We couldn't have a more pleasant visitor and I hope he comes early, so he'll have time to tell us all the news, don't you?"

"Yeh," answered Westy, "he's too talkative to suit me. I'm afraid he'll annoy Uncle Jeb's neighbors."

"They might move or even threaten to have Uncle Jeb evicted for allowing such noisy people on his premises."

"I reckon Ollie ain't sech a bad sort, boys, if I'm any jedge of human naitchur and I think I am. No one hain't ever fooled me yit, and at my age I don't think I'm likely ter be fooled. All Ollie Baxter asks in life is a good home 'n he has thet with Ol' Pop sure enough. Why, Pop hasn't a relative in the world and that's what Ollie likes about staying with him. Nobuddy to bother him."

"Well, but listen, Uncle Jeb," said Westy, his interest now thoroughly aroused. "Doesn't Ol' Pop make quite a lot of money during the summer season?"

"Yes, indeedy, son," he answered, chuckling, "and thar hain't a livin' soul knows whar he keeps it. All the folks aroun' are thet curious to know jes' what he does with his money. I even heard say thet thar are some who call him eccentric. Durn busybodies, thet's what I call sech folks. Tain't any one's affairs what he does with his money."

"Perhaps you're right," said Artie seriously, "but it may be people are afraid some harm will come to him during the long winter months, when he is alone there except for Ollie. Hoarding money is a dangerous practice. I should think he'd prefer putting it in the bank anyway so it would draw some interest for him."

"Listen to the young banker!" Westy teased. "I bet you'll never let your money get rusty in the ground!"

"Not while there's banks to put it in," Artie retorted. "Believe me, I'm no believer in this Captain Kidd stuff anyway. It always causes a lot of trouble; people even killing one another trying to find

it. You always read that in books and in the end no one finds it after all."

"Who can tell but what Ol' Pop will die some day without having the chance to tell any one where it is," Westy cheerfully added.

"Tain't likely Ol' Pop will die for a long time yit," Uncle Jeb said, touched with the evident concern of the boys for his old friend. "Barrin' accident he's good fer twenty year at least, so thar's no need to worry. I spec when he gets ready he'll tell me."

"Let's hope so, anyway," Westy said as if quite willing to consign the subject to the mercy of Fate for a while.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE OBJECT ON THE CLIFF

THE days seemed to merge themselves one into the other, and, as Westy remarked, "Night did not seem to be a dividing factor in the present scheme of things at all."

Uncle Jeb built them a canoe, showing them how it was done in true Indian fashion. They launched it in Eagle Lake, with all the ceremony one would accord some palatial yacht.

One morning quite early, they set out for a swim, leaving Uncle Jeb behind whittling some wood with which to make a new bench for the cabin.

It promised to be a very warm day and Artie and Westy had no sooner arrived on the shores of the lake than they were into its cooling waters. They shouted in pure exultation, trying to outdo one another in aquatic prowess. Finally tiring of this, they clambered upon the banks to rest.

Westy had picked up a handful of pearly white pebbles that lined the shores and started skimming

them across the surface of the transparent water. Artie, meanwhile, was musing thoughtfully, eyes cast overhead, when he observed the two enormous eagles emerging from their rocky fortress and almost instantly disappearing above the clouds.

Upon hearing these miniature aeroplanes "take off," Westy also followed their swift flight with an observant eye until the billowy clouds hid them from his view, thereupon resuming his pebble skipping.

Artie, however, kept his watchful eye glued upon the spot that the birds had so recently left. Perhaps it was the steadfastness of his vision; perhaps not; but Artie could all but swear to it that some small object was moving on the cliff. He rubbed his eyes, thinking it was the sun deceiving him.

Yes, he was sure of it now; something surely was moving. Without speaking, he simply gripped Westy's arm, as if fearful that his voice would break the spell. He pointed above them.

Feeling the tensy of Artie's grip upon him, Westy followed the direction of that hand in utter bewilderment.

The small object seemed to be moving on the very edge of the cliff. Now it looked to be hanging on

the precipice, while the boys sat breathless—waiting.

There was a slight movement as the object revealed itself to them.

"It's an eaglet!" exclaimed Westy in an excited whisper. "Probably just trying out its wings."

"Gw-an," answered Artie, as if thoroughly informed as to the eagles and their habits. "Whatcha think, a bird that size is just trying out its wings? It's trying something you can bet on that, but that isn't any eaglet, it's too full grown."

"Well, I won't argue with you about it. I know that eaglets are pretty big birds though. I know that much!" Westy said decisively.

"It's hard to tell from here," Artie said sagaciously. "Whatever it is, I'd like to know what kind of a stunt it's trying to pull off."

"Gee, so would I," Westy said with enthusiasm.

The minutes passed and still the stately young bird clung tenaciously to the precipice. The boys decided that it must be clinging with its sharp talons to the luxuriant undergrowth that wound itself around the cliff.

They still sat in silence and watched every move. It was swaying now, swaying dizzily, as if it was losing its grip.

"Why, I wonder," Artie spoke up, "doesn't he fly?"

"Search me!"

Suddenly, then, a harsh scream pierced the air as the unfortunate bird lost its hold and dropped—into the hollow just under the precipice.

Another scream; more shrill than the one before, a scream of pain—then Eagle Pass lapsed into its usual deathlike silence.

CHAPTER XXIV

ARTIE AS A MODERN DANIEL

"WELL," said Westy, jumping to his feet, "we ought to try and save that bird. I think its wing was broken!"

"Yeah, so do I," answered Artie. "How can it be done, I ask you? Besides being dangerous, I don't think that Mother and Father Eagle would appreciate our heroic efforts to do a good turn for their progeny, should they happen to return in the meantime. Also, young Eaglet may not possess a sense of gratitude if he's still alive and kicking when we get there."

"Granting what you say is true," said Westy seriously, "if we are to live up to the scout ideal we'll have to take a chance, just so we can relieve that poor wounded creature of its suffering. Certainly it must be in agony the way it screamed! Another thing," he continued, as if by way of explaining the feasibility of his plan, "there are two of us, and

while one rescues the bird the other can be on the lookout for the older birds' return."

"If you ask me which I'd rather do," said Artie with mock-seriousness, "I can tell you without a moment's hesitation."

"This isn't any time for fooling, Art!" pleaded Westy, craving action. "We've got to act, not talk."

"I got you the first time!" Artie answered good-naturedly; then: "I'll rescue the bird providing you act as lookout!"

"Well said!" replied Westy. "We'll step on it first and talk afterwards. Suppose we paddle across and save time?"

"Whatever you say, big boy!"

They paddled swiftly across the lake and landed almost at the foot of the trail to the cliff. Westy jumped out first and just as though it were agreed between them, led the way.

The trails to both cliffs were the same, going straight up from the lake like a stairway. They hurried along silently, stumbling over the loose rocks and underbrush that was more pronounced on this trail, being rarely trod upon.

Here and there, Westy noticed with his discern-

ing eye that some one lately, perhaps even the day before, had been walking up there also and descended the same way. A twig here and there had been snapped off and trampled underfoot as if in leisurely contemplation. Who, thought Westy, would be using that trail, and for what purpose? Then he reminded himself that it wasn't the time to be speculating on anything but the real object of their own presence on that forbidden trail. He deferred then to say anything to Artie of his discovery until later.

Artie, however, had not missed anything either, but kept silent and stumbled after Westy in a state of thrilled expectancy.

Approaching the edge of the cliff quite cautiously, they looked, first above and then around them. Then on their hands and knees they crawled over the jagged rocks. At last peering over the edge into the hollow, Westy could see the bird lying prone. Even with his inexperienced eye he could tell that it was a very young bird, but yet enormous. Artie was also looking and thinking the same thing. About to say so to Westy, he turned to find a very dubious expression on that young man's face.

"D'ye think you could make it, Art?" whispered Westy half fearfully. "Even though I'm shorter than you I'm pretty sure I could do it."

"Tut tut, m'lad!" answered Artie with an effort to conceal his appreciation of Westy's concern for his safety. "Sure I can make it all right. What I'm worrying about is, what'll I do when I get there?"

"Why," said Westy relieved, "all you have to do is hand me the bird. It's too exhausted to show any resistance."

"Well, here goes, then," said Artie softly, making ready to swing over the ledge. "I feel like Daniel entering the lion's den!"

CHAPTER XXV

TAKING CHANCES

THE bird had fallen in such a position that it lay out on the very edge of the hollow, thus making Artie's descent less precarious.

Westy helped him over until Artie's feet pointed directly to the center. Letting himself slowly down, he landed finally with a thump, safe and sound. Taking a cautious view of his present situation, he thought it looked like a box seat in a theater, the precipice forming a protective roof overhead. One of even medium stature could not stand upright in this haven of rock, so sequestered from all the world.

"Hey, Art, make it snappy, will you?" called Westy impatiently. "This isn't the time to dream!"

Artie leaned forward and touched the inert bird with his finger. It did not move. He repeated the action to make sure. Then, he lifted it slowly, gently, and ever so cautiously with both hands, but was convinced that he had nothing whatsoever to fear from that source.

His next move was to lift the bird high enough so that Westy (who was hanging perilously over the edge with outstretched hands) could grasp it. To do this, it was necessary for him to step out on the tip end of the ledge, where there was a slight eminence. From there he thought he could reach up to Westy's dangling fingers without having to release his hold on the helpless bird at all.

Artie realized as he pondered over the wisdom of this, that one misstep meant—eternity. Holding his breath and with a firm resolve not to look out nor down, he concentrated his mind solely on his two feet. He quickly mounted the jagged edge, clasping the bird tight with both hands.

"All set?" he cried to Westy excitedly. "You'll have to grab it quick for I won't be able to keep my balance for long."

"Righto!" answered Westy, sensing the peril of both, but putting all of his courage in each of his hands, he leaned as far over as he possibly could, without throwing himself over altogether.

They both reached, but, alas, came about within three inches of making it.

"I can't, Wes, it's no use," Artie cried, "it just

can't be done!" He was feeling sick now from the suspense.

"Could you just throw it easy, Art? Try it! I won't miss it and this little distance won't hurt it any more than it has been hurt!"

"Sure—anything, so long as I get off from here."

Artie tried to steady himself once more. Then as lightly as possible he tossed it to Westy, who caught it, surprisingly gentle.

Seeing Westy slowly but surely drawing himself back again upon terra firma, Artie, with a dizziness amounting almost to nausea, stepped down from that Pinnacle of Destiny and into safety.

Unashamed, he wiped the perspiration from off his face and sat down in the hollow a minute to regain his composure.

"Well!" he called to Westy. "I'm down, but how am I going to get out?"

"What were you saying, Art?" Westy shouted from above.

Artie repeated his question.

"Why you can get out the same way as you got in, can't you?"

"Not so's you can notice it!"

"Why not?"

"Why? Just because there isn't a place for me to get a foothold on the whole darn precipice; it's just as smooth as glass."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE EAGLES' RETURN

"NEVER mind, Artie old boy," Westy said soothingly. "I'll run down and get the rope out of the canoe. Won't take me a minute! You take a rest and try and enjoy the view while I am gone. Bet the lake looks like a regular amphitheater from there, doesn't it?"

"You told it!" replied Artie. "Say though, it's a shame you didn't get the chance to come down and take a look at the amphitheater yourself. If you had told me of your curiosity, I'd have let you get the bird yourself. There's not a selfish motive in my make-up!"

"I'll say there isn't," Westy answered, glad of Artie's good humor.

"Artie!"

"What?"

"I am pretty sure I think I hear the eagles coming back!"

"Don't tell me that! You sure?"

"Yep."

"What did you do with the bird?"

"I laid it back on a rock and wrapped my scarf around it until I can see what's the trouble with it."

"You better take it and run to the lake, Wes! They're coming fast. I can see them way off."

"You don't think I'm going to let you stay here all alone, do you?" Westy fairly screamed. "What kind of a scout do you think I am, huh?"

"I'm safe enough here. You grab that bird and beat it as quick as you can. There'll be something doing if they find the bird lying there hurt and you too! Two of us can't fit in here and besides there isn't time. You run and wait by the lake until they go away again, then you can help me get out. Oh, hurry, Wes, please, they're almost here!"

Not having any other choice, Westy was spurred into action by Artie's pleading voice. He took the bird up carefully and started on a run, skillfully dodging in and out of the trees and bushes down along the trail. This he did to camouflage his presence from the two eagles, who had already descended upon the cliff.

He maneuvered his descent without discovery,

looking back from time to time to reassure himself that Artie was safe from detection.

Reaching the lake, he went over to the canoe, where they had beached it. To his dismay he found that in their excitement they had turned it over after getting out, leaving the end that had held the rope hanging over the water's edge. Consequently it had dropped out and floated away and probably by this time it was floating its merry way down into the subterranean depths of Eagle Lake.

"Can you beat that for luck?" Westy questioned aloud. "I can't paddle the darn thing across either with this bird in my hands, and I'm afraid to lay it down. I'll have to get around to the other side of the lake so I can keep my eye on Artie. I better hurry so I can tend to the poor thing. It's still alive all right; I can feel something moving."

He was out of breath between talking to himself and running, but finally he reached a spot where he could command an excellent view of the hollow. He waited a while, apprehensively. His patience was soon rewarded for he became aware of something moving within the hollow, and then perceived it was Artie waving his handkerchief to assure him of his safety.

Westy drew a deep breath, the first he had stopped to take since he had left Artie. He hated to think of having been forced to leave him up there alone.

"Gee whiz," he said aloud, as he slowly unwound his scarf from the bird, "if we hadn't stopped to fool we might have made it at that. Jimminy, I wonder?"

CHAPTER XXVII

HELP

As the scarf came slowly off, Westy gazed with awe and admiration at this ferocious, yet magnificent bird that he held within the hollow of his left arm. Tenderly he placed it down on the soft warm earth. Instantly an expression of perplexity, then amazement, appeared on his face. He stared and then bent closer.

Could it be possible, he thought? That he, Westy Martin, had so deceived himself and was so stupid as to hold the creature all this while and not know it?

"Why," he said aloud now, "I could swear I felt his heart beating!"

Then the light of reason dawned in his bewildered mind. It must have been his own heart palpitating with excitement and the exertion of running. Hadn't he held the bird close to his left breast? Of course!

"Well!" he spoke softly now, but with exasperation. "I'm the original dumb-bell! It probably was dead when Artie handed it to me! It's stone cold now! Can you beat it? And all this for nothing! As usual, poor Artie's the goat!" he murmured regretfully, looking up toward the imprisoned boy hopefully for some further sign from him.

There was none, for Artie wisely kept himself well within the enclosure, as the two eagles were now perched menacingly on the edge of the precipice.

"Can it be," thought Westy, "that they are already scenting their young one to where he had fallen?"

He felt suddenly panic-stricken as the birds, now screeching and fluttering back and forth over the cliff, seemed to be threatening something. He wondered if he should run back up there and try to fight off the birds. But the futility of the thought became apparent, when he remembered the missing rope and realized how utterly impossible it would be for him to try and fight those two enormous birds single handed. As yet, they did not seem to be aware of any intruder in their midst, so Westy decided the only course, and perhaps the wisest one, was to run back to the cabin for Uncle Jeb, while there was yet time. He figured that Artie, with luck

on his side, could manage for a while at least to keep in concealment.

It would be a race against odds; but nevertheless the chance would have to be taken.

Westy's feet hardly touched the ground, as he ran impetuously onward. Yet, it occurred to him, as one so often experiences in a dream, that his legs were moving, and although he knew he must have covered quite some distance, still it seemed that he was not gaining much momentum after all.

Thinking to save time, he struck into a trail that he and Artie had explored shortly after their arrival. It was a short cut to the cabin and they had only used it a few times. He hadn't gone far when he discovered that it had become so overgrown with weeds and a maze of underbrush, that it was almost impenetrable and would retard his progress considerably.

Disgustedly he turned back, stumbling over rocks, his hands cut from brambles, his face bleeding from overhanging branches that struck him as he rushed blindly on.

Retrieving his way once more, he at last came within sight of the cabin, all the while shouting lustily for Uncle Jeb. There wasn't a sign of him inside

or out, he soon realized, almost distracted. What to do next he did not know!

"Here," he thought aloud, "this isn't any way for a scout to do things! Why, I'm acting like a panicky schoolgirl. I've got to get help and get it quick!"

He decided first that Uncle Jeb couldn't have gone very far, as the shavings of the partly made bench were still lying scattered over the ground back of the cabin. That in itself was sufficient proof of his imminent return, he reasoned, because one of the many fine qualities Uncle Jeb possessed was neatness. It was characteristic of him that, despite his extremely interesting career devoted wholly to the Great Outdoors, disorder of any kind never held a place in his fine, wholesome life.

Coming around to the front of the cabin, an idea presented itself to him as he happened to glance westward. At a short distance from the clearing around the cabin, there was a decided and almost sharp break in the ground that reminded one of a sort of jumping-off place. This declined straight downward, forming a gulley running on either side of the cabin as far as the eye could see. Beyond, the mountains climbed again in their eternal race with the

clouds, utterly indifferent to the yawning gulley that nature had so inconsistently cleft in their sides.

Before the idea was fully formed in his mind, Westy was going foot over foot down the rocky ladder that Mother Earth through æons of time had, in her process of reconstruction, worn away. This she had generously provided, realizing, in her infinite wisdom, the helplessness of the poor human mortal.

Reaching the bottom, Westy looked around for a second and then started his climb up the other side. Not losing a moment, he soon gained a high spot that commanded a pretty fair view of the wild country surrounding the isolated cabin.

Raising his hands to his mouth and bringing all his lung power into play, he hallooed vehemently in each direction. His voice reverberated, it seemed to him, throughout the whole United States. He thought actually five whole minutes had passed before the echo died away into nothingness.

Just as he was about to try once again, he was rewarded with a faint, almost unintelligible answer. . . .

CHAPTER XXVIII

BETWEEN TWO FIRES

EVERYTHING was silent again, and Westy waited, all the while listening intently. Then he tried it once more. This time the answer came not so clear, but louder. He recognized the voice immediately as Uncle Jeb's and it did not sound far away either.

"Where—are—you?" he called ever so slowly.

"Up—at—the—elm," came the answer, faint again.

"M'gosh!" exclaimed Westy. "The elm? The elm?" he repeated, trying to figure out where it was and what had happened. There was only one distinctive elm tree that he had heard Uncle Jeb mention, and that was a little distance above the cabin, overhanging the gulley. That must be the place, he assured himself.

That he didn't meet with disaster was nothing short of good luck, for he didn't walk or run—he fairly slid down that precipitous slope.

The elm wasn't far and, by keeping in the gulley, Westy soon reached it, not much the worse for wear. There he found Uncle Jeb lying helpless and bleeding quite profusely from a hole in his head. His foot was securely caught in an old rusty bear trap. He was not unconscious, but quite exhausted from the pain in his foot that the trap with its terrible pressure was causing. Also, Westy detected at once, he was extremely weak from loss of blood. He bandaged his head with strips of his own and Uncle Jeb's handkerchief. Then with the aid of some old sticks lying around in the gulley he finally succeeded in dislodging the old scout's foot.

In spite of his age, Uncle Jeb was no weakling and though his foot and head were throbbing with intense pain, he managed to raise himself with Westy's aid.

"Wa-al, son, so fur, so good," he said weakly. "Can't expect a young fella like yuh to act as a crutch fer me though. Yuh better get Artie!"

Helping him down on a rock so he could rest, Westy related to Uncle Jeb all the events leading up to Artie's present peril.

"Sakes alive, boy!" he exclaimed, looking up with a discerning eye on the waning sun. "Thar's not a

secunt to waste fer yuh to git to the lake afore dark. As fer me, I kin take muh time and crawl back to the cabin slow. I kin make it all right!" he added, noting Westy's look of anxiety.

"Are you perfectly sure, Uncle Jeb?"

"Sure as yure a foot high," he answered with a forced cheeriness.

Westy accepted this declaration, not without a little dubiousness however. He had every reason to feel that way, for Uncle Jeb looked anything but capable of helping himself. If he was ever between two fires, he was now.

"Yuh go straight to the cabin, Westy! Take my rifle off the wall, but don't use it 'cept yuh get in a tight corner, 'n yuh'll find the rope and a lantern. I say tuh take the lantern so yuh kin signal Artie, 'n not cause I didn't think you cud find yer way back in the dark!" the old scout reassured Westy.

"I know you didn't, Uncle Jeb," Westy said, his voice quivering, and hating to leave, though he knew the time was flying.

"Go along now, boy!" Uncle Jeb commanded. He was wishing fervently that Westy would go, for his head was reeling and his mouth felt parched and

therefore he was afraid lest Westy should discover his steadily weakening condition.

So Westy took his leave of Uncle Jeb with a heavy heart and climbed out of the gulley, so as not to be tempted to look back and weaken.

After Westy disappeared from view, Uncle Jeb, with much difficulty and effort, managed to get on his hands and knees. It seemed to take him an hour to crawl a few feet, his foot felt so heavy and the pain was so great. After lying face downward for a few minutes so as to rest his dizzy head he raised up a bit and to his consternation it seemed to be growing dark.

"Funny!" he said aloud, "it's a-taken me all this time to get this fur. I'm feelin' durn sleepy, I know thet much!"

But it wasn't growing dark at all—except in Uncle Jeb's fevered mind, for a merciful unconsciousness had come to his rescue and was already plunging his tortured senses into oblivion.

CHAPTER XXIX

FACE TO FACE

WHEN Artie caught sight of Westy breaking into a run up the trail, he thought intuitively that he was going for help. Instantly he was warmed with good feeling and hope that they would return soon and find a way to effect his escape. He sat silent and rigid within the hollow, for the birds had put in their appearance now, frantically strutting back and forth over the precipice, evidently searching for some trace of their lost young.

One or the other kept guard on the precipice continuously, screeching with such terrific force that Artie felt as though the echo itself would all but ruin his hearing. His muscles were stiff and sore from the cramped position he was crouching in, and not only that, but he was getting hungry. He had had nothing to eat since breakfast, but tried to cheer himself with the thought that it was better for him to be hungry, and keep quiet about it, than to let the birds in on it.

At times when the eagle was stalking on the very edge of the cliff, the sun would reflect the bird's shadow upon the jagged rock in front of him, worn smooth and glass-like with age. Then, poor Artie would sit in a state of nervous terror until the shadow had passed.

His legs were aching violently, even though they seemed to be numb when he would try and relax them. His back felt almost as if it had become brittle and would snap in two, should he get the chance to stand upright. He was beginning to doubt very much that the chance would come, for whole months had passed in those hours since Westy went out of his life. What he would give, he thought, for one glimpse of the athletic young figure swinging furiously down the trail!

His vision was becoming blurred from the strain of watching so intently from such a distance. He was beginning to fancy at times that some of the pine trees along the trail were moving a little. Then he tried to reason that the lethargic state he was in from the hours of waiting, was responsible for his double vision. He did not want to admit that his nerves were giving way under the tense strain.

The sentry on guard was still screaming at inter-

vals, and poor Artie began to think he was screeching when he wasn't, and wasn't when he was. Then he tried to muster up his ebbing courage and with renewed hope looked down upon the trail once more. Surely, he thought, Westy could not be much longer! What on earth was keeping him?

The afternoon wore on and it began to get damp and chilly in the hollow after the sun had left. Slowly, ever so slowly, it was withdrawing its warm friendly rays from all about him. Then, finally, the last lingering light that had cast sort of a farewell shadow down upon the lake, died away and Artie felt now that he was surely deserted and left completely alone in the unfriendly chill of near-twilight.

A dozen times he had examined the smooth rocks over which he had slid into the hollow. Nowhere had he found a foothold with which to brace himself over the cliff. But, as hope springs eternal and the screeching had ceased now for quite a while, Artie arose to a stooping position. With eager eyes he sought once more some hidden crevice that perhaps he had overlooked. He felt cautiously of the smooth surface and with a gesture of despair resigned himself to the knowledge that without help it could not be done.

A deep silence now reigned and it gave Artie hope, thinking that perhaps the birds had given up the watch and gone back to their aerie. He stretched his aching body and getting to his feet boldly, carefully raised on his tiptoes, throwing his arms upward and running his fingers along the wall of rock. It was maddening, he thought, that his fingers couldn't grasp something! Oh, if only he were a few inches taller!

In this cogitative state of mind he heard a distinct rustle—silklike; maybe the wind. Then again—nearer. He listened intently as it came closer, and suddenly he felt something touch his fingers ever so lightly.

His warm blood seemed suddenly turned into an ice-like substance. For, peering above him, he found that he was looking directly into the face of an eagle!

CHAPTER XXX

CRIES

WHEN Westy left Uncle Jeb and started toward the cabin, he was frantically trying to dope out a plan with which to rescue Artie. A hundred and one ideas had already been half-formulated in his anxious mind, but none seemed logical when he tried to think of them being put into action.

He hadn't asked Uncle Jeb's advice, not only because he thought himself quite capable, but also because he didn't wish to overtax Uncle Jeb's needed strength by asking questions. He knew one thing, and that was, that the eagles wouldn't give up their search until dark anyway. And it was better that he should get Artie out before pitch dark and get back to the cabin.

Hurrying along with Uncle Jeb's rifle over one shoulder and the rope and lantern supported by his other arm, Westy could not help feeling a certain thrill. He felt like a real scout now, and an honest-to-goodness hunter. No one could possibly know

what a glorious feeling it really was. There wasn't the least bit of vanity or egotism about him, but nevertheless, just this once, he cherished a secret desire that his father, mother and sister might see him thus.

His thoughts he did not let interfere with his progress, for his flying feet had already outdistanced them, as it was still quite light when he began the last descent to the lake. The nearer he came the more fearful he was that perhaps it would be too late.

A half-finished prayer was still on his lips, as he swung out of the trail by the open lake. Walking over to the spot where he had left the dead bird, he raised his eyes apprehensively toward the hollow. He gasped!

There, perched on the ledge of the hollow, was an eagle, wings spread, as if for attack!

He frantically tried to perceive if Artie was moving within, but the eagle's spread wings screened Artie—if he was still there, alive——

"It can't be possible," he cried aloud, "that God would be so unmerciful!" Unashamed he dashed away the tears that were streaming down his cheeks. His cry echoed all around in the Pass.

It must have attracted the bird's attention, for Westy could see that it had turned on the ledge of the hollow and was looking down to the spot where he was standing. Then to his great joy, he heard a cry, a human voice, almost plaintive in tone.

The eagle, evidently nonplussed, flew back to the precipice with a screech that was awful to hear.

Westy realized with a deep sense of relief that not only had he been given an inspiration, but he had also succeeded in combating the bird's purpose, whatever it was, for the time being, at least. He now emitted a cry more cogently this time and valiantly tried to imitate the eagle's screech.

It answered!

Again and again Westy would cry and each time he was rewarded with an answer. But he knew he could not waste valuable time by keeping it up. It would be dark before a half hour elapsed. Then his face brightened as his eye lighted upon the still figure lying under his scarf.

"Will it do any good?" he questioned quite loud. "I wonder! Yet, it might work at that!"

Taking the bird in his arms and screaming intermittently, as before, Westy started up the trail at

breakneck speed, keeping his eye all the while on the hollow opposite and the precipice above it.

The eagle was now pacing to and fro on the ledge, giving Westy cry for cry.

It was a decidedly difficult thing for Westy to do, running up-hill at the pace he was and using his lung power to the limit besides.

By the time he reached the cliff he was exhausted. His throat was sore and he thought that perhaps when he finally got through shouting, he would certainly never be able to yell again. That, in itself, would be a tragic calamity to a scout such as Westy Martin.

CHAPTER XXXI

WESTY MAKES A SACRIFICE

QUICKLY and quietly, with a discerning eye around him, Westy picked a spot near the edge of the precipice in which to carry out his plan. At the foot of a giant tree in the moss-covered earth, with trembling but dexterous fingers, he dug into the ground, tearing away small rocks and dirt with a will that was born of strong determination.

The eagle, meanwhile, had been joined by its mate and together they screamed for vengeance, while the shadows gathered around them.

At last, apparently satisfied with the depth of the hole he had dug, Westy carefully lowered the dead bird into it, making sure it was so placed as to allow the tip-end of its wing to reach just above the top of the excavation. He then set to the task of re-filling the grave and went about it with a diligence that his frenzy for Artie's safety inspired.

Making sure there was ever so little of the bird's wing exposed, he packed the mound of earth around

it, but not too hard, and covered it high with pieces of broken rock of a certain size, and over the whole he placed a larger rock than those which he had placed around the mound.

All this time the birds seemed to be holding a sort of pow-wow as to what to do with Artie, who was anxiously wondering what Westy's scheme would bring about. In one breath he would mutter "good old Wes," and in the next one he would silently beseech him to hurry. It was awful, he thought, the time Westy was taking to do whatever he was at, when in reality it had not covered the whole of ten minutes. That one half hour of Artie's life, he afterward recalled, seemed to have covered a span of years. Undeniably he was no end thankful that the bird hadn't bothered him, and he realized it was Westy's timely return that saved him from a fate he shuddered to think of.

Westy had managed until now to keep his presence concealed from the ferocious birds. He wanted to; but now that his purpose was accomplished, he stood in full view of them, having crawled out to the edge of the precipice on his hands and knees.

Taking out his penknife, he clenched his teeth, and gashed several fingers on his left hand without

uttering a sound. He held his hand in such a way that the blood dripped over the ledge, and so walked back, marking a crimson trail over the gray-colored rocks, until he reached the little mound, allowing the scarlet fluid to saturate it and the earth around.

The pain from his wounded fingers was so intense and his throat felt so terribly sore when he began his cry, that his hoarse voice, plaintively reverberating through the tomblike hills and valleys, bewailed like some spectral chorus in the shadowy twilight.

The aggressive birds listened now in silence. But only for a few seconds. Their shrieks of threatening retribution that had previously been directed down to Artie's deafened ears were now transferred to the retreating Westy. He had gone down the trail a way and hid behind the protecting trunk of a large pine tree, still crying in answer to the eagle's screeches, his voice almost unintelligible now. His anxiety was soon diminished and he gave way to a sheer exultation of feeling, for the eagles had left the precipice and landed on the cliff, scenting the trail of fresh blood that Westy had sacrificed.

Moving nearer and nearer toward the mound under the tree, their cries told Westy that the search was at an end. He did not wait to see the culmina-

tion of their discovery, he glanced back only long enough to make sure they would have a long and difficult struggle to get the pile of rocks and dirt from off the uncovered wing.

Stopping long enough to wrap his scarf tightly around his hand and stem the flow of blood, Westy ran on down to the lake and continued so on up the other side to Artie's rescue.

Darkness had almost enveloped the hollow when Westy gained the precipice. Placing the lantern in such a position that he could see, he leaned over and in an inarticulate voice called Artie's name.

There was no answer.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BOND IS SEALED

THE perspiration stood out like little particles of frost on Westy's forehead.

"What," he asked himself, "has happened?"

Had Fate inevitably overtaken Artie after all? He couldn't and just wouldn't believe it! So raising the lantern above his head he swung it over the hollow that it might penetrate every niche of it. Then peering eagerly, he caught sight of a foot sticking out from under the projecting rock. His heart felt as if it had dropped a couple of inches, for the fact that Artie was lying there prostrate was perfectly evident.

Tying the rope around the lantern as best he could, considering that his maimed hand was little or no use, he lowered it carefully into the hollow. A sound emanated from below, and to Westy, who was expecting the worst, it sounded like some one groaning.

"Whassa matter?" the voice said in guttural tones. "Haven't you got any sense? Letting the sun shine in my face like that, huh? Lot of feeling you got for a guy, I'll tell the world!"

"The Lord have mercy on us," reverently exclaimed Westy, "he's delirious!"

"Delirious, my eyebrow!" the voice, now assuredly Artie's, replied. "M'gosh, zat you, Wes?"

"Bet your life!" answered Westy, with a heartfelt sigh of deep relief. Then: "How do you feel, Art? Think you can stand being hoisted up now?"

"Say now!" replied Artie, gazing gratefully up at Westy's worried countenance. "How do you get that way? Can I stand it? Well, I guess!"

"All right then," Westy murmured dubiously, "you better keep the lantern, Art, and tie the rope around your waist. I've got the other end O.K. Think you can manage to tie it?"

"Tie it?" Artie couldn't seem to comprehend.

"Yes," said Westy and then with hesitancy, "Will you be able to, I mean!"

"Well," exclaimed Artie, "I'll be blistered! Whatcha think I am, Wes, a cripple?"

"You can bet I don't think any such thing when you can talk that way."

"That's better, Wes; but say, where are my enemies?"

"The eagles?"

"Sure! What a foolish thing to ask. Who else would I be inquiring about so solicitously?"

"I don't like to hurry you, Art, but we can't spare any more time gossiping like a couple of old ladies over a clothesline. Our friends won't be much longer in digging out their progeny. Not only that but it's imperative we get back to Uncle Jeb as quick as possible, if you feel up to it!"

There were many questions and remarks that Artie would have liked to voice at that moment, but he realized that the seriousness of Westy's tone forbade it. He told him to go ahead and tie the rope to the tree and when he felt the tug he'd start.

It was like witnessing some one arising from the dead for Westy to see the familiar form of his friend come safely over the edge of the precipice. There was joy ringing in his soul and tears in his eyes, when he saw him get to his feet and untie the rope from around his waist. Westy rushed forward and put both his hands on Artie's shoulders.

"Gee, Art!" he said chokingly, "able to stand all right and all, huh?"

"Sure," Artie answered with a catch in his voice, affected by Westy's emotion, and then to cheer him: "I'm standing all right, but I suppose I'll feel like a pretzel for the next few days, until I get the kinks out from sitting down all wound around myself."

"Same ol' Artie! Then you weren't hurt at all?"

"Hurt? When?"

"When I first called you."

"Search me! I didn't know you were there until the lantern awakened me and you said something about me being delirious."

"Awakened you? Then——"

"Sure. I must have fallen asleep. I don't remember anything after I saw those enlarged screech owls fly away. No doubt their departure affected me to the point of exhaustion."

"Well, I'll be darned!" was all Westy could say. "You've an eye for slumber, I'll say that. Come on now, old boy, we have something to do before the night is over, I'm afraid. Will you take these things from me now? Then I can walk faster."

When Westy explained to him all that had occurred since he left the lake in the afternoon, he skipped lightly over the cause of his wounded hand. That he was in pain from it, Artie could almost feel in the darkness.

"And to think that you did all that for me, Wes!" he said, intense feeling in his words. "You're the best scout that ever lived!"

They had left the lake and were going up the trail. Artie could think of no other way to express his heartfelt gratitude to this true and tried friend of his, so he put his arm out and about Westy's shoulder firmly. Silently and hurriedly they went on through the dark, deep mountain forest, feeling in their hearts that the incidents of the day had served to cement a bond between them of loyalty and everlasting friendship that nothing could sever.

With his arm still about him, Artie seemed to feel that Westy's step dragged and halted a little now and then.

"Bet you're tired, Wes, huh?"

"Just a little, Art."

The moon came out just then in all her silver splendor, lighting up the trail along their way. Artie grasped the opportunity to glance at Westy so as to smile his deep appreciation, and was dismayed to see that his face was white and his lips looked almost green in the moonlight.

Renewing his grip on Westy's shoulder, he felt his body relax against his and saw his eyes close slowly.

CHAPTER XXXIII

UNCLE JEB FACES A CRISIS

ARTIE realized in a moment that it was exhaustion and the loss of blood that caused Westy's faint, so he braced himself and, with a prayer for the strength to do it, he managed to get him partly over his shoulder. Leaving the rifle, lantern and rope behind, he continued on, as he knew that he needed both hands and arms now for his present burden.

Coming out into the clearing at last, he could see that the cabin was in total darkness. He was breathing laboriously under the strain of Westy's dead weight, but was supremely thankful that he had at least succeeded in getting him there safely.

Kicking the door and calling loudly, he waited a minute, but received no response from within. He then laid Westy down upon the ground tenderly. The moonlight streamed through the whole interior of the cabin as Artie opened the door. Looking around, he saw to his further consternation that Uncle Jeb had not returned.

To resuscitate Westy was his first immediate duty and then to go to Uncle Jeb's relief was his next. He lighted the lamps and, fixing the bunk, he proceeded to get Westy into it. He removed his shoes and then set to work bathing his mutilated hand. He looked with pity at those poor gashed fingers. What a sacrifice, he thought, for him to make in order to get him out of the hollow and get back to give Uncle Jeb assistance as quickly as possible. Instinct had surely warned Westy aright in this case, for the poor old scout hadn't been able to make the grade after all.

So Artie hurriedly ministered to Westy and awaited anxiously for him to regain consciousness. His eager eyes detected a slight flush gradually mounting in those white cheeks. After a little while the eyelids flickered and opened slowly. A wan smile lighted his features when he saw Artie, anxious and concerned, sitting there waiting, a glass of water in his hand.

Artie held the glass to Westy's lips, supporting his head meanwhile with his free hand.

"Feel better, huh?" Artie asked, manifesting his concern.

"Uh huh! Feeling sleepy, though."

"That's fine! It'll do you good, Wes. Go to it!"

"Say, Art?"

"What?"

"Where's Uncle Jeb? He didn't get back, did he?"

"No, but don't worry, Wes! I'll have him here before you're awake," Artie said more decisively than he was inclined to feel. "Guess you will be O.K. till I get back. I'll leave a lantern lighted."

"Sure, I'll be all right! Feel tired enough to sleep all day to-morrow. Hope you get him back safe!"

"You can bank on it that I will! Now go to sleep!"

"One thing more, Art!"

"Yes?"

Artie, approaching the bunk, saw Westy's face wreathed in smiles and his hand extended. He clasped it, and with a look that told more than words could ever tell, he turned and walked out of the cabin.

With lantern in hand, Artie descended into the gulley walking along cautiously, anxiously looking for some sign or footprint of Uncle Jeb. Coming to the spot where Westy had left him, he found him lying there, burning with fever and delirious.

How he ever succeeded in getting Uncle Jeb back to the cabin, Artie could never quite say. It was nothing more than superhuman effort that came to his aid in getting the sick man up out of the gulley without adding to his discomfort any more than he could help.

Dawn was just beginning to tinge the far horizon with little flecks of light, when Artie half-carried, half-dragged Uncle Jeb into the cabin and laid him in his bunk.

Westy had not awakened, and his quiet, steady breathing bespoke the fact that his slumber was unbroken and nature had once more reasserted itself.

Though his body was utterly weary and his eyes felt weighted down with want of sleep, Artie kept constant vigil by Uncle Jeb's side. He bathed his swollen foot at intervals until the swelling began to gradually diminish.

The hole in his head was what worried Artie most, and he figured that Uncle Jeb, after catching his foot in the bear trap under the elm tree, probably tried with much exertion, to extricate it from the vise that held it, and in his excitement had stepped back further than he was aware. In his fall into the gulley he must have struck his head on a sharp rock.

The only thing to do was to keep the wound clean and wait until Westy had awakened. Then, he could go to the Inn and get the doctor who was stopping there now.

About nine o'clock Westy awoke, refreshed and better. He wanted to go to the Inn himself, seeing the haggard, drawn look on Artie's face, but the tired boy wouldn't hear of it, so he did as he was told and took up the vigil.

When Artie returned from the Inn that afternoon with the doctor, he looked as if he needed medical attention himself and that learned person told him so. But he assured him that sleep was all that he required.

Uncle Jeb was in a delirious state again, as they entered, and his temperature had mounted considerably, so the doctor lost no time in caring for him.

After a while when the fever had subsided somewhat and the sick man had lapsed into a heavy sleep, the doctor turned to attend to Westy's wants. Going about his task he marveled at the courage the boy possessed to have done a thing like that.

That night the physician stayed on, and also the two following nights. The anxious trio were weary

and worn with the long waiting, for Uncle Jeb's condition was serious. It was a crucial test for the two young scouts, and they were grieved and filled with apprehension that perhaps they would have to return alone.

The night of the third day there was a change in his condition—for the better. He slept throughout the night, the doctor never leaving his side; likewise the boys.

Then, as the last glittering star in the ethereal firmament faded away, he opened his eyes and gazed weakly, but wide-eyed, around him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

FORGOTTEN FOOTPRINTS

It would be needless to say that hearts were light and voices happy in the little cabin that day. The doctor had just left and assured them that Uncle Jeb was on the fast road to recovery.

When he had disappeared from view, Artie and Westy entered the cabin and sat down to entertain Uncle Jeb with some talk. He asked, for the first time since his illness, just how things had occurred on that near-fateful day. They related in detail all the events and happenings. He smiled with pride at the integrity these two boys had shown.

"I kinda reckon thet it was what you fellas would call a day chuckful o' good turns, eh?" he chuckled.

"I guess that's about it, Uncle Jeb," Westy answered, glad of his old-time good humor returning.

They had planned a while back to camp by the lake for a few days before the summer season was over, and now Uncle Jeb brought up the topic again, and

promised them they would go as soon as his strength returned.

It was nearing the end of August and the weather was still very warm, so Artie and Westy received this news with pleasure evidenced in their smiling faces.

"We'll go," said Uncle Jeb, "providin' yuh promise not to take it into yure heads to go a-rescuin' dead eagles!"

"We promise," they both answered with mock-gravity.

They had camped several times out through the different trails west of the cabin, and as a sequel to their recent perilous adventure, they joyously anticipated sleeping so close to it.

That they were two extraordinary boys, Uncle Jeb quietly admitted, for fear seemed utterly foreign to their natures. After their experiences in that region, one would think they would shun the spot, but not Artie and Westy. It lured them on and the old trapper sagaciously told them that, not only were they Boy Scouts of merit, but full-fledged real scouts.

On a bright morning shortly after, they took to the trail in company with the two mules, intending to go on to the Inn before they returned.

They had much to be thankful for, this blithesome trio, swinging along under the glaring sun, without a care in the world. Uncle Jeb after his serious illness seemed to have renewed health once again. He was whistling merrily, by way of expressing himself, and the boys joined in.

With exultant voices echoing throughout the Pass, and back around the lake again, they made camp. Now and then their shouts rang boldly and daringly up toward the hollow and reverberated over the precipice, defying the eagles now from a safe distance. But the day sped onward, crammed full of things to do, and still there was no sign of their erstwhile enemies.

"Wa-al," explained Uncle Jeb, when Westy eagerly asked him if he thought they were liable to nest somewhere else, "it's a-happened afore, thet they go way fer a spell like thet, 'n if we hain't a-seen 'em so fur, 'tain't likely yure a-goin' ter see 'em fer a while longer."

They were sitting cozily content around a bright crackling fire, the stars shimmering overhead and a new moon making its initial bow, as yet just faintly visible in the distant heavens.

Uncle Jeb had been gazing in front of him, his

eyes gradually roving up toward the hollow and around over the Pass. For a moment, it seemed to Westy that he started a little. Then he continued to look again.

"I guess I'm plumb crazy, boys," he began, "but I cud a-swore I seed one o' them durn flashlights afore on that precipice, movin' back'n forth."

Artie and Westy straightened up, aroused. They knew Uncle Jeb was never given to seeing things. But, to their disappointment, they couldn't discern anything up on the cliff at all. The moon was still in its infancy, and around the hollow and through the Pass one could not penetrate the inky blackness.

"Yit," said Uncle Jeb, as if trying to reason it out with himself, "I'm as shure of it as I kin be, but then thar isn't a pusson aroun' these parts that would go up on a bet, 'ceptin' you rascals!"

They laughed at the faint hint of admiration that would creep into his voice whenever he referred to the incident.

Resuming his thoughtful preoccupation, they tried to concentrate their vision also, but soon gave it up. Evidently, Uncle Jeb discerned nothing further either, as he arose and yawned sleepily. Putting the fire out they all turned in.

Now Westy, being the romantic and imaginative boy he was, lay rolled in his blankets, gazing fixedly at the stars overhead. The cool night wind caressed his face, as he pondered and turned over in his mind what Uncle Jeb had mentioned about no one around those parts who would dare venture up on the cliff. He suddenly remembered with a thrill the discovery he had made and forgotten about until now. There was no doubt about it, now that he came to think of it again. The day that Artie and he ascended that forbidden trail, the marks were perfectly plain.

Another person had traveled that trail, other than they.

CHAPTER XXXV

GHOSTS

How long he lay awake thinking about this, Westy did not know. In fact, he could not even remember having fallen asleep at all.

He found himself looking above again, wide-awake. In turning around to shift his position facing the lake, he became aware of a pinkish reflection in the sky, just beyond the Pass. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. This time he was sure of it, and saw that it was turning a deeper hue.

What, he thought, could it be? A forest fire? No! He measured the distance of the reflection with his eye, and knew that it wasn't in the mountains. It came to him with a start that it was just about in the direction of the Inn.

Suddenly he arose, quietly, not wanting to arouse the sleepers, should it happen to prove a false alarm.

The capricious moon was now out in all her glory, gleaming down upon the lake and over the cliffs.

Whether her purpose was intentional or not, she seemed deliberately to withhold from the narrow Pass even one stray little moonbeam.

Westy tiptoed away, and when he got at a safe margin, he started to run until he got around the lake. Up through the Pass he went, feeling his way securely. Then coming to a rock that would afford him a strong foothold, he clambered up and over the rough stones. There in the distance, sparks shooting into the sky like miniature rockets, was a seething mass of flame. It must be the Inn!

What a terrible situation, he thought!

When Ollie came up to the cabin with their mail, two days ago, he told Uncle Jeb in his quiet blunt way that there were not any guests at the Inn now. There had been an epidemic of scarlet fever among the guests during the past month, and after each stricken one recovered he left. Ol' Pop Burrows was the last one to contract it and still had it in fact, so the remaining guest had taken his leave promptly.

The doctor, who came up from Eagle City every day, forbade Ol' Pop to let any one else come until he was up and around and the place could be thoroughly fumigated. He had inoculated Ollie with some serum or other, as a preventative against the

disease, so that he could take care of Ol' Pop without danger of infection.

Ollie went on to say that Ol' Pop wouldn't stay in bed unless he saw the doctor coming, and had insisted on Ollie taking the mail to the cabin regardless of the quarantine. He fairly writhed in anger, with all this "new-fangled bizness o' fumigatin'." He said he didn't care about having any more tourists come that season anyhow, for he had made all the money he wanted to already.

Westy remembered, as he stood there contemplating about it, having heard Uncle Jeb say that Ollie told him all this outside the cabin, beyond their hearing. He still retained his maddening reticence in the presence of the boys.

"So!" Westy exclaimed softly. "They must be there alone, and Ol' Pop still sick! Something will have to be done."

At that moment he had turned in the act of descending, when he saw in the moonlight beyond a form running swiftly toward the Pass. Westy caught his breath and wondered if the form had espied him. In the next second he knew that it had not, for he was invisible in the darkness where

he stood. And he gave thanks to the supercilious Silver Queen reigning over the heavens that night for her timely partiality.

He crouched and waited after having climbed down almost to the trail. Nearer and nearer the steps came, light and quick, almost panther-like in action. Finally as a gust of wind would strike one going past a cavern, so the form rushing past Westy felt like a stray breeze in that calm night.

Removing his shoes, he started in pursuit of the fleeing figure. His feet, encountering the sharp rocks along the way, soon became too bruised to keep in step with this spooky object. After putting his shoes back on, he took up the chase once more as quietly as possible and came at last to the fork in the trail.

The pursued one went straight up the trail to the hollow, as though it was thoroughly familiar to him, never once looking back or stumbling on the way. He just seemed to be rushing blindly on.

Westy peered from behind a rock and perceived that the form was not likely to be aware of him now, for his own individual interests and motives seemingly occupied his whole thought and attention.

So Westy rushed down and around the lake not caring if the figure did see him, for his whole duty now lay in the direction of the Inn.

As he came forward, Uncle Jeb and Artie who were sitting up conversing in low tones, looked at him indifferently.

"Uncle Jeb!" whispered Westy, breathless and excited. "Uncle Jeb! I think that the Inn's on fire!"

"Yuh don't mean to say!" Uncle Jeb gasped in astonishment. "How d'ye know, boy?"

Westy pointed over toward the Pass and there beyond it and overhead was the reflection in the sky, now a flaming scarlet.

"I saw it from the Pass," Westy continued, as if to explain. "I'm perfectly sure of it, Uncle Jeb; that is where it is. And I saw something else in the Pass too——"

Before Westy could finish his story, Uncle Jeb had nudged his arm and pointed above them to the hollow. They all looked and could not repress the chills that ran up and down their spines.

There in the bright light of the moon was the ghost-like figure of a man descending from the precipice into the hollow on a rope!

CHAPTER XXXVI

WESTY CIRCUMVENTS A GHOST?

FOR a few tense moments they stood, staring and unmoved, as if glued to the very spot. The apparition had disappeared within the hollow and it seemed to them that, perhaps after all, it was only a spirit they had seen hovering over the precipice. Suddenly Artie broke the spell.

"Spirits don't generally use ropes, do they?" he asked naïvely, as if he had been thinking it over seriously.

"No, and spirits don't make a noise running through the Pass at night either!" Westy exclaimed. He then explained to them the weird sight he had witnessed. How he had first discovered the figure hurrying in the moonlight beyond, and then gradually becoming enveloped in the darkness, coming through the Pass. "I didn't imagine it either, for I could hear him breathing as he ran past me. When I started after him and we got to the Fork, he went straight up to the cliff!"

Artie was wide-eyed with excitement when Westy revealed to them the possibility of it being a lowly mortal who was causing this furore, but Uncle Jeb listened rather skeptically to the detailed account of this unusual adventure, and preferred believing his own way, irrespective of any other proof, no matter how convincing it might seem.

"I reckon we hain't got no call ter be meddlin' aroun' with ghosts," Uncle Jeb put in. "I guess we jes' better leave him ter his spooky bizness up thar, so long as he hain't hurtin' anything o' ourn. We'll jes' git along pronto ter the Inn!"

Taking his rifle, they started off, Uncle Jeb going it as fast as they. Reaching the Fork, Westy was seized with a most inordinate desire to lag behind a little. He looked longingly up the trail and wondered if he could chance it.

Uncle Jeb and Artie, running along, kept silent so as to keep what strength they had for some later, unseen need. But so preoccupied were they with the shadow of disaster ahead that they were not aware of their missing member.

Westy stood rigid at the Fork as they went on, until he ceased to hear the steady patter of their shoes along the trail. Then, he turned and went up

the trail, swiftly but quietly, stepping as much as possible on the moss-covered ground and paying strict attention that he was keeping well out of the limelight.

Breathless, his nerves tingling with the thrilling excitement of the mysterious, he got down flat on his stomach as he made the Cliff. Slowly, ever so slowly, he dragged his body over the cold, rough stones. Directly in the moonlight, he approached the precipice cautiously and looked over.

The hollow was dark and Westy could not see anything to satisfy his curiosity. He listened intently, having covered his nostrils with his handkerchief to muffle the sound of his own breathing. Gradually, he was rewarded. Sounds; some one inhaling as if under intense strain. Then there reached his keen ears the monotonous chip, chip, that a metal instrument would make coming in direct contact with stone.

Whoever it was, thought Westy, they were well within the enclosure, carrying out some dark, hidden purpose in selecting such an hour as this. But what for?

Hadn't Artie been imprisoned in there long enough to know every inch of that dank, gloomy place? He

certainly didn't overlook a spot on that smooth surface anywhere in his frenzied attempts to get out.

That something was in the wind was a certainty. Westy resolved then and there to find out what it was before another sun had set upon the horizon. He was never more sure of anything in his whole life than he was right now, that a human being was concerned in all this and not any ghost, as Uncle Jeb would have it.

It wasn't just the sporting thing to do, this fearless scout thought, to be poking into things that perhaps wouldn't turn out to be his affair after all. He chided himself for having let Uncle Jeb and Artie go on unknowingly, and perhaps have to bear the brunt of the danger that was threatening and even at the present moment might have already invaded the Inn.

And so, as he started to draw back as cautiously as he came, his hand came in contact with something rough, just under the weedy growth that sprouted wild between the rocks. Westy stopped and divided the weeds and saw that it was a rope that he had touched. It ran right over the precipice, just as the watchers had seen the figure descend on it. Fate

was surely on his side at least, he thought, secretly smiling.

Following the course of the rope he came to a large pine tree, quite a way back on the cliff, where it was tied ever so securely, to the bottom of the trunk. With a deep sigh of satisfaction, he turned and ran pell-mell on down to the Pass and so into the black night again.

His heart contracted with dread when he came stumbling out of the Pass into the open trail once more. There ahead of him was a sight formidable enough to put fear into the heart of any one. It actually looked as though the country around for miles was a seething furnace, the glare in the sky was so great. Westy drew the cool night air into his lungs and started a fresh pace.

Coming nearer and nearer, and at last leaving the mountain trail behind, he took the open road, dashing across fields now and then to save whatever time he could. As he rested for a few precious seconds, almost within calling distance of the Inn, he could feel the force of the heat even there that this raging inferno was expelling over the surrounding countryside. This fact spurred him on considerably,

and at last he reached there pretty much out of breath.

The outbuildings were all ablaze and the stable was now a mere memory of its former glory, the crimson embers being the only thing left to identify the spot. One end of the Inn had already caught fire and was in a fair way to continue with fury.

Nothing could be seen of either Artie or Uncle Jeb in the front at all. Darting around to the back, shouting at the top of his voice all the while, he came upon them, also trying to make themselves heard and pounding frantically on the back door. Westy realized why they hadn't heard him, between the deafening roar of the flames and the noise of their own voices.

Uncle Jeb and Artie looked at Westy as though he were a ghost also.

"Wha-ar hev yuh been, lad?" he asked quickly, but with deep concern. "Yuh shure gave us one scare. Never missed yuh 'til we got yonder. Artie 'n I went a ways back agin, 'n cudn't find ye nohow. Jes' got here a minit back, 'n we find all them durn shutters barred from t' inside, 'n both doors bolted too. Nary a one o' them hez answered yit, 'n ye can't git them doors down even with a hatchet."

In their present excitement, Uncle Jeb and Artie forgot about Westy's disappearance, for which he was glad. Time enough for that later, he thought.

The heat was becoming unbearable in the back and, unable to stand it further, they went around to the front again. They went over each individual window on the way around and shook the doors with all their might. Why the windows were shuttered and barred at this time of year Uncle Jeb could not conceive. His anxiety was plainly visible through the deep emotion in his voice. He said they had called at the front and back both until they were hoarse. There wasn't any way that they could break in downstairs. Doors and shutters were both of logs, and even with a hatchet it would take one half the night to make even a dent in one of them. The upper windows were likewise fortified and the frenzied trio stood there helpless, wondering how two people could sleep through all this.

The lower part of the building was built entirely of logs and the upper part of frame. A slate-covered shed over the veranda ran straight up to the bedroom windows in such a way that it would be a difficult thing for one to try and balance himself upon it.

Westy was taking note of all this while Uncle Jeb was talking and he was also thinking fast.

"I can't fer my life know what Ol' Pop's a-thinkin' o', a-barrin' himself in like thet on a hot night. Never knew him ter do it afore 'cept in winter, o' course," Uncle Jeb said, plainly puzzled.

"The whole back is afire now!" exclaimed Artie, who came running around from the side of the Inn.

"Well!" said Westy decisively, as if he had told them in detail before what he contemplated doing. "I'll have to take the nine-hundredth chance, I guess."

"What?" asked Artie excitedly.

"Just give me a boost from the railing, that's all!"

"You're not——" Artie and Uncle Jeb both spoke simultaneously.

Before they finished what they had started to say, Westy had hopped on the porch railing and was making ready to climb the pillar supporting it.

CHAPTER XXXVII

EVIDENCE

ARTIE realized in a flash the seriousness of Westy's intention, and without any further comment gave him a boost up the pillar and onto the shed.

Westy pulled himself up gradually until he was sure that he could stand on his feet with safety. He went around to the side-windows first, trying each only to find they were all barred. With only one more to attempt, he approached it half-fearfully lest it should prove inaccessible too. With trembling fingers he tugged at it and, to his great joy, it yielded.

Artie and Uncle Jeb watched him from below with anxious eyes, beseeching him to be careful and to hurry.

The window was tight shut; locked! But Westy was not to be deterred from his purpose at this time. Raising his knee with determination he struck the glass with a force that sent it crashing into frag-

ments inside. Still there came no sound whatever from within that silent interior.

Stepping through the broken pane into the room he called, but all he could hear was the roar of the flames. The heat in the room was unbearable and he couldn't see very well in the darkness.

He stumbled over one chair and then another. With hands outstretched, he felt something cold. He laughed at the start it gave him for, on examining it closer, he found it to be one of those old-fashioned marble-topped bureaus. It was one of those huge affairs, ample enough to hold the wardrobe of one's entire lifetime. Reaching out into the space around him again, his hand now came in contact with something else; a bed. He could feel the soft covers and knew by its very smoothness that it had been unoccupied that night. Where, he thought, was the door? What room did Ol' Pop use? These and a hundred other thoughts were flashing constantly in his active brain, while he was groping there in the darkness.

If it hadn't been that he knocked the ancient water pitcher and its attendant wash-basin over in his roaming, he probably would have been another half hour trying to find the door. For just after

the two articles reached the floor in various pieces Westy shoved his foot ahead of him to kick them aside and in doing so he put his foot on one of the slippery pieces. He landed plunk on the floor, sitting neatly in a pool of water that the pitcher had so recently held. As he sat there so, his eye was just on the level with a little fleck of light, to his right. He put his head over further toward it and his hand out. He felt a door knob revolving under his grasp and knew instantly that the light he had seen was through the keyhole. What joy, what rapture, he thought, as the door swung open under his pressure.

But his ecstasy was of very short duration, for, stepping out into the hall, he saw to his horror the light that he had so joyously perceived through the keyhole wasn't any beacon of safety. It came from the back bedrooms. They were afire! The heat struck his face as he stood there and made it feel blistered.

He stood in the doorway and the light from the burning rooms reflected into the bedroom brightly. Glancing back of him, he saw some towels hanging on a rack above the washstand, whose receptacles he had just demolished. Rushing in, he grabbed a couple of them and stooped, sopping them

in the water that had formed a miniature pool on the floor. Taking these, he entered the hall, calling loudly again and ran wildly to the back, one of the towels protecting his face.

He opened one door after the other, but it was unnecessary for him to touch the last door at all. The flames had already destroyed the upper half of it and one could see inside perfectly. They were all practically gone now but yet, it looked to Westy that they had been devoid of any occupants that night, even in the present state of chaos and havoc that this terrible menace had created.

Running to the front again, he opened another one of the bedroom doors. A sickening odor reached him and his heart stood still. Lying on the bed was a form, apparently asleep, outlined against the darkness from the red glare in the back. Westy went over to the bed and bent close. It was Ol' Pop!

The old scout seemed to be hardly breathing at all. In point of fact, it was so faintly and he was lying so rigid and still that Westy realized with a shock he must be unconscious.

Then the flames bursting out into the back of the hall shone through, tingeing the room a scarlet hue.

It provided a sort of arc light and Westy could see Ol' Pop very plain now.

A handkerchief was covering the lower part of his face and Westy gently removed it. As he did so, that nauseating odor permeated the whole room again, and his own nostrils seemed to be filled with it. He raised the piece of muslin to his face.

It had been saturated with chloroform!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

GONE

THE heat was so terrific and the fact that poor Ol' Pop was unconscious made Westy feel a little panic-stricken for the moment. He would try, he thought, getting him down the stairs as gently as possible, if there was yet time.

Pulling back the covers, Westy discovered to his further dismay that the poor old fellow was bound hand and foot to the bed with heavy rope.

"Oh!" exclaimed Westy aloud, thankfully. "The Lord bless my penknife to-night!"

He had a task to do this, for the rope was exceptionally tough and strong. Finally when the last one released the helpless man, Westy tied the wet towel around his head. Then he started in his struggle to remove him, first out of bed and then into the hall.

Reaching the stairs, he saw in consternation that the fire had now taken its toll of these and the whole lower floor also. Suddenly and almost within two

feet of them, the flames shot upward from the floor and Westy stepped back quickly. The towel that covered his face was almost dry and his hands and head felt blistered from this fresh onslaught in front of them. Within a second, there was another roar and everything about them in the hall burst into flame. Half dragging his heavy burden, he stepped into the bedroom, which he had previously entered from outside. Just as he slammed the door behind him, there was a terrible, almost deafening roar again. With a terrific crash he could feel the impact of the ceilings and floors giving way.

"Whew," said Westy aloud by the door. "What a piece of luck!"

With another struggle he reached the window and, looking behind him, saw the flames licking their way up the bedroom door. The sight of it made his throat feel so parched that he felt it too was burning. He tried then, to get Ol' Pop out first, but it was no go. Then, just as he was about to call for help, he saw Uncle Jeb climbing up on the shed and Artie behind him.

No word was spoken between them, as they lifted the old man gently out of the window. Artie and Uncle Jeb got down by the porch-railing first with

waiting arms outstretched. Westy handed him into their care. As he turned to slide down the pillar, he could see the darting flames leaping out of the window behind him.

They carried the unconscious man a distance away from the intense heat and, laying him down on the soft grass, tried to revive him. Uncle Jeb had found a couple of pails and fetched some water from the spring which had been the source of supply to the Inn. They were busy mopping his face and moistening his lips with the cooling water in their tireless efforts to see some sign of hope on that pale countenance.

Westy looked toward Uncle Jeb sitting quietly there on the ground in the near-dawn. He was gazing at his old friend and there were tears trickling down that weather-beaten visage and his lips were quivering visibly.

It was a sad-looking little company that the breaking day beheld. Huddled on the ground, shivering in the gray chill of early morning, they sat with anxious glances directed toward the still figure lying on the ground blanketed with their coats. Westy and Artie could not suppress the tears brimming in

their eyes, from the emotion and pity they felt for Uncle Jeb and the quiet form at their feet.

Almost about to give up hope, the sounds of natural breathing returned in Ol' Pop and they moved nearer joyously. Each taking a hand and rubbing his wrists, they waited anxiously.

Opening his shrewd eyes, he raised his head weakly, but yet showing that the ordeal wouldn't have any further effect on his general health, which was as hardy as any of his type.

He looked toward the smoldering embers, that were the only remnants left of the little rustic Inn, standing just the day before in all its quaint and native beauty. He shook his head sadly, then the dawn of a sudden thought seemed to light in his mind.

"Wa-al, pardner!" he said with a hint of exasperation in his voice. "You 'n I hev lived ter be this age, 'n hed to git fooled fer the fust time in our lives by a tenderfoot. Jes' goes ter show yure never too old ter git kicked!"

"What makes you say that?" Westy asked without being invited, and before either Uncle Jeb or Artie had time to get their breath.

"Fust o' all," continued Pop, ignoring Westy's question. Raising on his elbow he shook his finger with determination. "How 'd ye all git here and git me out 'n the bargain?"

Uncle Jeb acted as spokesman and explained as quickly as possible of Westy's discovery in the sky. He omitted, whether intentionally or not the two boys wondered, mentioning about the ghost.

"Yuh all lissen ter me, 'n I'll tell yer somethin', fer it don't make a bit o' difference now, becuz it's gone by this time anyhow."

"Gone?" they all asked in a chorus.

"Shure ez yure a-sittin' thar all o' ye. My money 's gone every pesky cent. 'N if I hed my way, I'd like ter see thet rascally scoundrel hang fer it. I'd never believed it o' him!"

"Who?" they all asked.

"Ollie!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE MAN WITHOUT A SOUL

UNCLE JEB started, they all started in fact, but Ol' Pop seemed oblivious of their evident surprise. Taking a fresh hold with his elbow he continued on, as though his recent statement was nothing extraordinary.

"Ter begin with," he said, "I noticed as how Ollie took ter actin' peculiar-like fer quite a spell back. He kept a-askin' me if I wuz makin' much money 'n if I saved much afore I run the Inn. I'd ketch him every so often lookin' at me funny, but I didn' let myself think much 'bout it. Then, I wuz taken with thet pesky red fever or whatever durn name they give it. Wa-al, when he hears the Doctor say I wuz gittin' better 'n cud git out in a few days, I caught him a-lookin' at me right nasty. After he gits supper he sits aroun' agin eyein' me, 'n it makes me feel so creepy, I go up ter my room ter git clean away frum him. I'm a-sittin' in a rockin' chair a-thinkin' 'bout it and wonderin' what in Sam Hill's

got in ter him. Thar I sit, rockin' back 'n forth by the winder when I happens ter hear the door creak. I turn quick and the door is openin' slowly, until finally it's wide-open. Thar in the doorway stands Ollie, with thet silly grin what he's hed on him lately. Not only hez he the grin, but also a gun, which he's a-pointin' at me, and a rope.

"Fer the minit I think he's gone plumb crazy, but then I know as how I'm mistakin' in thet, fer when he starts ter talk, it wuz as natcherell as the little bit he ever did talk.

" 'Ol' Pop Burrows,' sez Ollie, sounding like the cemetery bell the day thet Sheriff Biggs wuz popped off by Sly Pete Wozzle, 'I'm a-goin' ter make my get away to-night!'

" 'Go ahead!' I sez, 'the better the sooner!' I wuz thet chilly frum hearin' the spooky voice on him, I gits all rattled as ter what I wuz talkin'.

" 'I intend to!' he sez ag'in, jes' like a funeral march. 'But not afore yer tells me whar yer keeps yer swag!'

" 'Sufferin' merskeeters!' I sez. 'What's thet?'

" 'Yer dough,' he answers.

"I tells him then, thet it wud hev ter be over my carcass, and he sez jes' like one o' them undertakers,

thet over my carcass it would be, fer he intended sending me West.

“ ‘Feller,’ I sez, tryin’ ter be pleasin’ ’n thinkin’ it may calm his crazy head, ‘what foolish talk ’bout sendin’ me West. Why, I hain’t never been no place else all my life, ’n I got no call ter go now.’

“ ‘Oh, no, yer ain’t never been as fur West as I’ll send yer, if yer don’t cough up whar the boot is,’ he sez, wavin’ the gun at me.

“ ‘O-ho!’ I sez, thinkin’ I cud kill time. ‘So, it’s my poor shoes yure after now, eh? Are yer thet hard-hearted as ter leave me in my stockin’ feet? Wa-al, thar right on my feet, fer yuh ter take off if yer want. Thar’s one thing I kin say though ’n thet is, them soles on the shoes will wear a-hang sight better ’n yourn!’

“ ‘Yer can’t kid me, yuh ol’ Shylock!’ he sez, orderin’ me over ter the bed.

“Then, he sez as how I hez to git in or he’ll shoot me. I gits in shure enough ’n he ties me fast ter the bed with the rope. After thet he puts the kivvers over me jes as though it wuz cold weather. He starts shootin’ the gun ter the ceilin’ ’n tells me he gives me the hull o’ five minits ter tell him whar I hide my money. I let four o’ the minits go by ’n

ez he's a-gettin' ready ter aim, I tells him ez it's up on the Precipice, the haunted one, off o' Eagle Pass, hid in the holler underneath."

Uncle Jeb straightened perceptibly, likewise Westy and Artie. Ol' Pop continued without noticing the surprise they had shown.

"He asks me whar'bouts in the holler 'n I sez the holler is so small he cudn't miss it. I sez thet, thinkin' he'd go and maybe some help wud come in ther meantime frum somewhar. He leaves me then, tied in bed, 'n warns me thet if he doesn't find it he'll kill me when he comes back.

"Wa-al, he went away 'n afore he goes what duz he do but bar all the shutters 'n lock the winders and doors. It seems like he's gone all night 'n I git thet sleepy, I must o' dozed a little. Bye 'n bye, I wake 'n thar he is with the gun 'n madder 'n a hatter. He tells me then thet he's set fire ter my stable 'n soaked everything around with coal-oil. He then sez jes like ez if he wuz doin' me a big favor, thet he intends ter let me burn along with the rest, unless I tell him jes whar'bouts in the holler the money is. At thet minit, I hear the hosses, stomping and whinnying like babies 'n settin' up a terrible fuss. That's the only thing what made me tell the rascally

scoundrel. Jes for the sake o' them poor hosses."

"I ask him wud he save the hosses shure, if I tell him 'n he sez yes. But instead o' thet he laughs after I tell and sez as how he hez no intention o' savin' the hosses ner me neither. Laughin' jes like a maniac, he takes a handkerchief outer his pocket 'n a bottle 'n when he pours the stuff outer it he sez, 'Here's how, yuh ol' miser!' Thet's the last I remember 'n ever want to 'bout Ollie Baxter. Yuh kin bet he's found the money 'n we'll never see him ag'in!"

"I don't know about that!" Westy interposed smilingly. The sun was rising in the east and the day was beginning to take on her mantle of light in real earnest now.

"What do yer mean, son?" asked poor Ol' Pop sadly.

"Yes, what do you mean, Wes?" Artie and Uncle Jeb both asked curiously.

"He got into the hollow sure enough and I guess he found the money all right, but he'll never get out unless one of us goes there to get him out!" Westy said mysteriously.

"Why?" interrogated the voices in unison.

"Because I cut the rope!"

CHAPTER XL

OLLIE MAKES HIS EXIT

WHEN Ol' Pop felt up to it they started back for Eagle Pass to breakfast. He was talking with Uncle Jeb and said he hadn't decided what he would do for a while and would stay in the cabin while he was thinking it over. Anyhow, he mentioned that if his money was still intact, he could live the rest of his life in comfort.

Westy and Artie walking ahead could hear them talking and wondered then why Ol' Pop had risked his money to such a place as the hollow! Not only his money, but it had almost cost him his life, they thought, and all for what?

Undoubtedly if we could answer questions like those, we would have to be infinite in our wisdom.

However, the two old scouts praised these two young scouts for their intuitive sense concerning Ollie, and vowed that they would never again think they were too old to learn something from these younger minds.

As they rounded the lake they all glanced simultaneously up toward the hollow with eager eyes. There was Ollie, who had spied them as soon as they appeared at the lake, leaning over the edge waving to them frantically for help. Westy remarked that he thought it was just the thing he would do. A coward when he was cornered.

They sat there joyously eating breakfast, watching his frenzied appeals for help. It was Westy who had suggested letting him suffer at least apprehension, if they couldn't make him suffer anything else. Any one so devoid of human feeling as this stone-faced individual deserved the full limits of the law, he concluded.

"I told you from the looks of his eyes he didn't have any soul!" Artie said proudly.

"Wa-al, boys," Uncle Jeb said, "it wuz shure left fer you 'uns ter show us, wuzn't it?"

"I hope you won't believe the hollow is haunted any more?" Westy asked Uncle Jeb.

"No, indeedy, not now!" he said, chuckling, and then turned to Ol' Pop. "How cum, yer ol' crony you, thet ye picked thet durn place ter hide yer money?"

"Cuz," answered Ol' Pop, not very informative,

"I didn' believe in any fool ghosts, 'n you 'n all the folks here'bouts did."

After breakfast, when they got good and ready, Westy and Artie started off around the lake, feeling for all the world like two officials of the law. Westy, in the lead going up the Cliff trail, had Uncle Jeb's rifle nonchalantly slung over his left shoulder. No matter how indifferently placed it looked to the beholder, Westy was perfectly aware of its exact position, for it took him at least five minutes to get it placed in the right position, just as he wanted it. Artie had a club in his hand that looked rather primitive in design, but nevertheless he felt that it was a weapon of defense at least.

Reaching the precipice cautiously, these two boy scouts made sure they were unheard before they approached the enemy.

Ollie was too busy concentrating his gaze toward the lake and didn't see or hear them coming.

"Hands up!" Westy commanded authoritatively. "Hand the money over quick or I'll blow your brains out!" He was now waving the rifle menacingly back and forth between Ollie's little eyes.

"You mean throw the money up, don't you, Wes?" Artie said in a very un-official tone.

Westy gave Artie a black look that rather told him how unseemly his remark had been.

"Of course, that's what I did say!" he lied gallantly to save his face.

"What youse kids trying to do, scare me?" Ollie said in the east-side vernacular and with a show of bravado. "Youse haven't a chanct in the woild!"

"Is that so!" exclaimed Westy and more for something further to say than anything else continued, "Your old friends, the bulls, are just coming up the trail now with a nice pair of bracelets for you. Are you going to throw that money box up here?"

"I can't!" said Ollie, visibly pale. "It's too heavy."

"Very well," said Westy, master of the situation at once. "I'll hand you the rope and you can tie it around the box, so we can haul it up."

"Aw-right!" said Ollie, his teeth chattering now. "Are the bulls there now?"

"Coming!" said Westy.

He kept the rifle pointed directly at him, as Artie struggled with the heavy steel box coming over the precipice. When it had landed safely, Artie carried it back a way on the Cliff. Westy, his curiosity aroused, drew back from the precipice to look at the

incentive of all the trouble. He and Artie were conversing in low tones about the weight of the box.

"Say, Wes," asked Artie very softly, "what made you say that?"

"About the bulls?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I don't know. I just hit the nail on the head too. I suppose though it must have been my own common sense told me that Ollie was a criminal before, or he wouldn't have done such a low, despicable thing to poor Ol' Pop."

Whether Ollie Baxter thought that the bulls had finally arrived on the scene is a question. Westy has always thought so anyway, and we are inclined to believe him. He claims that Ollie must have become panic-stricken, mistaking his and Artie's low converse for the bulls.

At any rate, be that as it may, there was a sudden cry as of fright, and by the time Westy and Artie got to the end of the precipice and looked over, Ollie Baxter was plunging in mid-air through that vast space and hence into Eagle Lake.

CHAPTER XLI

SKELETONS

WHEN Westy and Artie reached the lake bearing the heavy steel-box with Ol' Pop's life-savings intact, Uncle Jeb and his old pardner were scanning the surface of the lake with all their might.

Westy set the box down and Ol' Pop took his hand and his voice shook with emotion and the deep gratitude he felt for this boy who had rendered him such help.

"Don't know how I'm a-goin' ter pay yer back!" he said. "Guess nothin' I cud give yer wud be worth what I owe yer, but I kin tell yer pronto, boy, yure good-stuff 'n never will I forget ye as long as I live!"

Westy felt well repaid in having him just talk like that. Indeed it made him feel shy and embarrassed to have this hardy old pioneer condescend to a lowly boy scout such as he. He tried to tell Pop as best he could that he wanted no pay of any kind, and

that he had done no more than any boy should do.

Leaving Ol' Pop to his wealth Uncle Jeb and the boys started around the lake.

"Did you notice the exact spot he jumped in, Uncle Jeb?" Westy asked.

"As fur as I cud see, he landed right about thar!" Uncle Jeb explained, pointing his finger toward the spot he meant. "He wuz a-comin' on down thet fast, turnin' somersaults all the way, thet it made me right dizzy ter watch him. He landed with a thump 'n I reckon he never did cum up agin, he went down thet fast."

"Well, I have a good mind to take a plunge and do a little investigating myself," Westy said enthusiastically.

"Go to it!" Artie said heartily.

"Be careful, boy!" Uncle Jeb warned him. "Yuh've hed yure share o' narrow escapes already!"

"I will!" called Westy, making the plunge.

He swam around for a while and, finding no trace of anything, returned to the shore.

All that day they kept watch, but nothing revealed itself from the lake. Night came and they sat around the campfire once more, warmed in soul as well as

body, that they were all sitting there safe and sound.

Westy and Artie were voicing their regrets that the summer had gone so quickly.

Events of the night before were gone over again, and, as the last spark of the fire died out on that pebbly shore, Westy rolled into his blankets, face upturned to the starry skies once again. They were to return to the cabin in the morning and he wanted to fix in his mind forever the beautiful spectacle that surrounded him, revealing all its naked beauty to his wondering eyes.

The stars overhead in that dark blue sky, shimmering and twinkling down upon him, seemed to want to confide in him the mystery of the heavens. The mountains around, so frowning and formidable in aspect to most people, looked to Westy that night majestic and serene, a solid wall of protection to mankind. Everything around him in fact that night brought gladness to his heart for he was happy in the thought that he had been of benefit to his fellow-beings.

And so musing, sleep seemed utterly to have deserted him and he felt not the least need of any.

"Well," he whispered softly, "this is the last night under the stars, so I might as well make the most of

it. Guess I'll paddle around and finish my dreaming out here while I'm at it!"

He entered the canoe noiselessly and pushed off, lapping the water lightly with the paddle, seeming hardly to have touched it at all.

The fact that a tragedy had entered the lake that day, did not make Westy fear it at night. What he was not afraid of living, he surely wouldn't fear dead.

His thoughts drifting lazily along and with his dreamy eyes fixed on Her Majesty, the Moon, he felt something strike the canoe.

The impact felt no more than what a small log would in striking it, but nevertheless Westy, always observing, looked.

It was mentioned before that Westy did not know what fear was. To retract it a little it can be here recorded, that he did receive quite a shock at first when he looked over the side of the canoe.

There floating in the water, directly in the moonlight, was the skeleton of a man and a few yards away from that—was another.

CHAPTER XLII

THE LOST IS FOUND

THIS time Westy uttered a cry, even if only one of surprise, but still a cry and it awakened the little slumbering camp.

He had paddled back to shore by the time Uncle Jeb and Artie reached there. Telling them of his discovery, they jumped into the canoe and went back to the spot. The skeletons were still floating there all right and with the aid of their paddles the boys succeeded in pushing the spooky-looking things onto shore.

Needless to say another night was lost in which to sleep, but they were in no mood to lie down in peaceful slumber after looking at anything like that. Lying on the shore side by side in the yellow moonlight, they were a weird and ghastly sight.

Westy bent down and saw that around the neck of one was an object of some kind. He touched it carefully and then again. Taking out his trusty pen-knife, he cut the string that held it, not caring to touch the poor creature with his bare hands.

As it came off, and Westy held it up, he saw to his surprise that it was an oil-skin wallet. No wonder it had stayed intact while the flesh of its owner had deteriorated into nothingness!

He held it up in the light while Uncle Jeb and Artie gathered around him. It was air-tight all right and Westy found, when he finally got it open, that it contained papers; probably some important, official documents, they thought.

While the moon was bright it was not light enough to see clearly and so be able to read them.

When morning came and breakfast was finished, Westy brought the papers out. The writing was pretty unintelligible now, but still Westy could make out words here and there. He gasped with astonishment and read aloud to his dumbfounded listeners.

Mr. John Temple's name was mentioned, as representing a certain railroad, and giving him the right of way over a certain tract of ground belonging to one Ezra Knapp, for a given consideration. It all ran along those lines and there was at least enough decipherable to know what it was all about.

"It's the agreement!" exclaimed Uncle Jeb, "thet Mr. Temple felt so bad over losing!"

"Then——" before Artie could finish Westy broke in.

"They must be the skeletons of the lost surveyors!"

How those poor men met their death in that watery grave is not known, probably never will be, but it is a certainty, as Westy remarked, that no matter how useless Ollie Baxter's life may have been, his death was timely and for some good purpose.

Westy figured that the force of Ollie's body in striking bottom must have disturbed those two skeletons, lying there through all those years, sending them floating to the top, while his remained on bottom.

At any event Ollie Baxter has never been seen again, but he surely did Westy a good turn in doing what he did.

They telegraphed from Eagle City the next day, to Mr. Temple, of Westy's wonderful find.

It meant great rejoicing to Mr. Temple and before he left Bridgeboro for the West, he called on Westy's father.

He told Mr. Martin what a big thing it had been for his son to have unearthed the agreement. He .

went on to say that it meant one of the biggest business deals of the day and that they would surely have to reward him.

Mr. Martin said he spoke for Westy and knew that his son wouldn't think of any such thing, but was only too happy to have rendered Mr. Temple that service.

After Mr. Temple had left, promising to bring the boys safely back with him, Mrs. Martin looked at her husband, eyes gleaming with pride.

"With all your shouting," she said smilingly, "about that boy's romanticism and lack of business ideas he's proven himself a bigger and better business man than you are!"

"My dear!" said Mr. Martin with good-humor, "don't rub it in! I know when I'm licked!"

One morning, a few days later, Westy and Mr. Temple stood looking up toward the precipice. The older man was telling this wonder-scout that everything was settled and in readiness to continue where they had to leave off ten years ago. The cliff, he told him, with its little tragic hollow would be dynamited within the next two months to make way for the interests of bigger and better business.

"So, what do you think of your accomplishments, Westy?" Mr. Temple asked, waving his hand over toward the Pass and then to the Cliff.

"Well," replied Westy, smiling, "I guess that's that!"

THE END



WESTY TRIED TO PULL, TAKING A FIRMER HOLD ON THE
FAINTING BOY'S ARM.

Westy Martin on the Santa Fe Trail.

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WESTY MARTIN ON THE SANTA FE TRAIL

BY
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WESTY MARTIN ON THE SANTA FE TRAIL

CHAPTER I

WESTY GETS A GOOD START

WESTY felt that he was in hard luck! In fact, he felt that Fate had played the meanest kind of a trick on him, just when he needed all his vision to live up to the plaudits of the multitude.

The truth of the matter was, some stray particles of dust had been blowing around and at a most inopportune moment sought seclusion in his eye, much to the annoyance of our hero.

Now, Westy Martin had every qualification needed to deserve the title of hero. At least every scout in Bridgeboro was unanimous in this instance, so, what right has a tenderfoot questioning the wisdom of the scout's decision!

Indeed, if one were to betray any tendency toward

incredulity, by so much as a slightly uplifted brow, they would descend en masse upon the unbeliever and shout with loud derision. In short, you would be the object of their amazement that your stupidity could be carried to the point of not knowing who Westy Martin was.

They would then go on to tell you in stentorian voices (Pee-wee's being the nearest and loudest, thus forcing you to move a little out of its range) that Westy Martin was now about to embark upon the motion picture industry through the intervention of Mr. Madison C. Wilde, Field Manager of Educational Films.

"Why, sure," gasped Pee-wee, taking the center of the stage as usual, "this Mr. Wilde has always been friendly with the Martins ever since Westy did a good turn for him out in the Yellowstone. And now, this summer, Mr. Wilde is going down through some parts of Texas and New Mexico and take some pictures of the Santa Fe Trail. When it goes on the screen the name of the picture will be, To-day and To-morrow."

"You poor dumb-bell, it will not," interposed Ed Carlyle. "It's to be titled, The Old Santa Fe Trail —Past and Present."

"Well, what's the difference anyhow? It all sounds the same to me."

Whereupon Ed was at once silenced with a menacing stare from Pee-wee, who continued to tell the interested onlooker of just what Westy's duties with Educational Films would consist of. Upon that point Pee-wee did not make himself quite clear, as he didn't know, nor had he the faintest idea. Neither did any one else.

However, that did not detract one bit from the glamor that now encircled Westy like a halo. Enough that Mr. Wilde had invited Westy upon the trip. Who would want any more prestige than that? Pee-wee wanted to know.

Lastly, Westy was none other than the boy of Rocky Mountain fame and the protégée of Uncle Jeb Rushmore of Temple Camp, the best scout in America since Buffalo Bill. Yes, sir, and he had taught Westy all there was to know about real scouting in pioneer fashion.

After Pee-wee or any others got that explanation off their respective chests and you had the audacity to confess ignorance of Uncle Jeb's fame also, why your case would be classed as hopeless. Hopeless, that is, so far as the affairs of real he-men were con-

cerned. A look of the most profound pity would be cast in your direction and then, as if time was too valuable to be wasted on one of second-rate intellect, you would be dismissed from their minds.

Following the line of perspective, Westy presently came into view again on the observation platform, bowing to his comrades with adolescent indifference.

By this time, even the most incredulous bystander of the lot could not help thinking, in view of all Westy's gathering, seeing must be believing. He did seem, by all the rules of the game, a veritable god and hero as it were, standing there surrounded by such a galaxy of admirers.

Yes, it could not be denied that he looked impressive with Mr. Wilde sitting at his elbow and his family gathered around him with Billy, the cameraman, also looking on.

Ripley Langley (Rip for short), the other junior member of the expedition, was among those present and also a nephew of Mr. Wilde's. He was lolling about on the polished railing, watching the scene with amused interest. He was that kind of a boy. Things always amused and interested him simultaneously.

When the clang of steel platforms dropping and

all the other last-minute activities warned them that time was short, Mr. Wilde bid farewell to Westy's parents and went inside, leaving him alone for the moment before the train started.

Mrs. Martin kissed her son fondly and wiped aside the stray tear. Mr. Martin, with a brusque but kindly handclasp, ran true to form and admonished him to steer clear of the Indians he should encounter. He told Westy that they could not be trusted even in these civilized times; there always being danger of reverting to the savage state. After a few other warnings, Mr. Martin took his leave, thoroughly satisfied that his duty was well done.

Thereupon, in wild acclaim Westy's brother scouts emitted cheers loud and long, led in a big voice by little Pee-wee.

"Bring me back an Indian souvenir, Wes!" Artie Van Arlen shouted.

"Yeh, me too!" came from Ed Carlisle and Warde Hollister in unison.

Then as the cries of All Aboard were heard and the train moved out slowly, Pee-wee's voice roared. He just couldn't resist a parting shot.

"Say, Wes, bring me back a hunk of cactus in your hip pocket, will you?"

"Sure thing! 'By!"

CHAPTER II

RIP ISN'T CONVINCED

WESTY stood where he was for a few moments, loathe to leave the spot where he had so recently been the cynosure of every eye. Truly, it was gratifying, that knowledge, and he was pleased with himself. What boy wouldn't be? He had been publicly acclaimed as a hero, and now being identified with the movies served to distinguish him more than ever.

If the casual bystander could have seen him at that moment, I am afraid that Westy's heroic appearance would not have been quite so manifest. At any rate, he certainly looked for all the world as though he was in the throes of deepest grief.

Try as he would, he could not prevent the moisture from emanating out of his blinking eyes. He presented a pitiable contrast to his recent triumphant state, and he knew it. His other eye had also become afflicted with the same foreign substance, now

making his visionary powers difficult with either one. And he was sore at the world. Sore, because he was afraid that he wouldn't be able to convince Rip Langley of the true cause of his affliction.

He knew what Rip would think when he caught sight of his tear-stained face; that he was crying because he had just left his father and mother behind. That's what Rip would think.

For some reason or other, Westy had a feeling about Rip already. He felt that this boy, his junior by a year and a half, was something of a skeptic and it was his first move to set him on the right track at the start.

Presently then, Westy sauntered in the smoking room with an air of perfect nonchalance. His friends were lounging about—Rip included.

Stepping up to a large mirror over the lounge, Westy made a great pretense of examining and administering to his overflowing orbs.

“'Lo!” said Rip suddenly, but friendly.

“'Lo!” answered Westy, relieved but yet feeling Rip's searching eyes at his back.

Mr. Wilde also looked up with the inevitable unlighted cigar in his mouth and the derby hat in its accustomed place. He smiled.

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Fine, so far, Westy commented to himself secretly.

"Well, what's the dirt?" Rip questioned, typical of himself and looking straight at Westy.

"What dirt?" He floundered a little but, gathering courage again: "Where?"

A chuckle of cynical good humor escaped from Rip.

"In your eye! Where did you think I meant?"

CHAPTER III

A DANGEROUS SILENCE

IT was quite late and the usual hum and buzz of masculine voices in the smoking room were missing. The train went screeching through the dark, rainy night, indifferent to all else save the purpose of its own mission in life.

Westy and Rip were sitting opposite one another, trying to penetrate the inky blackness outside the dripping window panes. Nothing but a shroud of blackness covered the earth. They gave it up.

"Gee, I'll be glad to walk on the ground again," Rip said, breaking the silence.

"Here, too," agreed Westy. "Morning can't come quick enough to suit me."

Mr. Wilde, occupying the seat with them, laid down the book he had been reading and grinned genially.

"Getting kind of restless, eh, kids?"

"I'll say we are!" said Rip, spokesman for the two. "Do we hoof it very much, Unk, after we

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leave this ring-tailed roarer in the morning?"

"Somewhat. I dare say you'll both have enough walking by the time we're ready to come back. We are to start out from a place called Wakarusa. Outfit will be all ready for us to get away at once. No waiting, thank goodness."

"Outfit?" queried Rip. "What's this going to be, Unk; another covered wagon affair?"

"Not so's you'll ever notice it. Catch you modern kids traveling in a covered wagon. With all that either of you have learned about scouting I'd like to see what you'd do with the few necessities that the old pioneers had to do with in the days on the Old Trail."

"Oh, I don't know," Westy protested. "Uncle Jeb gave me a lot of dope that I could use in a tight pinch. We could do a lot if we had to, eh, Rip?"

"Betcha life," he replied airily. "We could show some of these modern pikers a thing or two."

It is to be seen that when it came to getting on the defensive side of scouting, Westy and Rip pledged a momentary truce and became kindred spirits; to Mr. Wilde's enjoyment. He was having the time of his life kidding them.

"All right, scouts, I hope you will get the chance

to show me then some day. But I am afraid you're going to be disappointed on this trip if you've been looking forward to anything more exciting than shooting the scenery. I gave my solemn promise to both your parents that I'd keep the watchful eye all over. When we get back home you and Westy can give me a few exhibitions of your skill and prowess in the back-to-nature bunk in Martin's back yard.

This was adding insult to injury of course, but neither of them could make a come-back. Mr. Wilde could see by their expressions that the parental promise hadn't made a very big hit with them at all.

Billy, who had been peacefully dozing throughout the discussion, came to with a yawn.

"'S no use sitting up listening to the rain all night. What d'you say?" He addressed them all.

"I guess we better," answered Mr. Wilde, and motioning to the boys as he walked toward the open doorway. "Better turn in, boys. We get out pretty early."

"Gosh, I don't feel a bit like it, do you, Wes?"

"Naw, I'm too excited to think about it even. They say all those old pioneers like Kit Carson and

Uncle Dick Wooton hardly ever slept at all. They had to keep awake and watch for the Indians."

"Watcha talking about? They didn't watch for the Indians at all," he contradicted in a superior tone of voice.

"What did they do then, huh?"

"Went out and got 'em red-handed. They had to, because they were redskins, get me?"

"Do I get you? I'm way ahead of you."

"You score all right. You know what?"

"What?"

"I'd like to be a fireman on this road when I get older."

"Not me. I'd rather be the engineer. Why'd you like to be the fireman, Rip?"

"They got better chances of seeing what's going on while they're riding and the engineer has to keep his mind and eyes straight ahead."

"Gee, that's right." Westy was beginning to recognize the superior intelligence of his new friend and felt more kindness toward him.

A few minutes after the porter entered, his arms occupied by various sizes and shapes of various colored shoes. Westy rose and Rip followed suit.

It lacked another minute before midnight would

open her portals to welcome the infant day, and still Westy lay wide-eyed in his berth, staring into the darkness. Rip's heavy breathing above him and the occasional light creak of the springs, betrayed the fact that Rip's sleep was by no means dreamless.

Wes listened intently as the wheels glided on in flight. Sometimes it gave him the sensation that they weren't in motion at all, for the roadbed was so smooth that the Limited annihilated the miles like a winged serpent.

They went over a crossing, for he could hear the bell as they passed tinkling its warning of danger to the unwary. Then all lapsed into silence again save the steady drowsy hum of the engine.

Yes, all was silent in the Pullman, too. Silent, except for the loud nasal chorus of those who would proclaim to the whole world their slumbering state. The porter, his cares laid aside for the time, was also contributing his bit in a minor key and at intervals he became very entertaining and shifted down to something that sounded like a bass note, but producing a weird echo like that of a rattlesnake dying. Westy was sure he preferred the minor key; it was much more comforting to hear.

He thought after a while that an hour or more

must have passed. His eyes burned for the want of sleep and his throat was awful dry. Poking his head through the curtain he ascertained whether there was any one about. Not a soul anywhere at either end. Good thing they had the end section; he wouldn't have to slip anything on. Padding out to the water cooler, he quenched his thirst hurriedly and got back in his berth again without encountering any one, and tried his luck at sleeping for the hundredth time.

Suddenly he felt an impact that fairly shook him in his berth. The emergency brake most likely, and in the next moment he knew he reasoned about right as the whole car seemed to throb and tremble before coming to a dead stop.

"Gee," he whispered softly to himself, lying with eyes wide and ears straining for some sound, "every one else but me must be unconscious if that didn't wake them."

Evidently no one had heard anything, nor were they aware of the stationary attitude of the train. The heavy breathing and loud snores continued uninterrupted as before.

Of course, it wasn't such an unusual thing for a fast train to stop suddenly out on the plains at night, nor anywhere else for that matter. But, he reasoned,

it was unusual for the emergency brake to be applied as it was and then stand as they did without even a whistle or warning of any kind.

Save for the patter of the falling rain there was a dead silence; not a human sound outside and yet that very silence was pregnant with danger.

Westy got up and dressed.

CHAPTER IV

A HERO BY CHANCE

IT didn't take Westy half a minute to dress on that occasion, but it took him longer than that to rouse Rip, tug as he did at his bed clothes.

"Whassa matter, anyway?" His voice sounded startled.

"Shush!" warned Westy. "Get into your clothes quick as you can, 'n' don't make any noise."

That was sufficient to silence the quick-witted Rip and in a second he was lowering himself from his upper berth and down into the darkened aisle as noiselessly as a cat. Westy made a gesture indicating the need of utmost secrecy as to their next move and motioned Rip to follow him.

On the platform, Westy tried to open the door on the right side of the train, but couldn't seem to make the lever work. Then turning to the door on his left, he tried that and this time with success. They clambered down softly on the wet, soggy ground.

"I don't know at all what's the matter," Westy confided to Rip in guarded tones.

"Well, by heck! What did you drag me out here for?"

"We'll just go along easy and find out if there is anything wrong." He wasn't a bit perturbed at Rip's peevishness.

Rip mumbled something about Westy being a poor misguided nut and all the other classical phrases so useful in our present-day vernacular. Nevertheless, he plodded on after him, albeit a good deal sleepy.

They stole along in the dark and through the pelting rain, keeping close beside the cars. Their Pullman was first in line after the mail and baggage cars, so it did not take them long to walk the distance between.

Westy couldn't see a thing and, leading the way instinctively, held his arms out at length. Just as he could discern the dim outline of the engine ahead his outstretched hand came in contact with something. He stopped short as he heard the thud of a heavy object striking the soft, wet roadbed. Then to the surprise of both, they realized that another human being was also doing some sleuthing on his own and had muttered a low, almost unintelligible, curse.

"Aw right! I'm beat! Ya got me proper," came

the voice in true New York, east-side dialect. "Watcha going to do next, huh?"

Instinct and intuition probably prompted Westy's answer more than anything else. Or, it might have been that his foot kicked something at the same time when he stepped forward in the direction of the voice. At any rate, he stooped and picked it up.

"Hold 'em up!" Westy's voice commanded, sounding strange even to himself. Rip was holding his breath waiting for the next thing to happen, for he naturally thought that the deep hoarseness emanating from the throat of his comrade was a temporary bluff to make the east-sider believe his opponents were men. However, no one but Westy himself ever knew just what did cause this remarkable change and in view of subsequent happenings it wouldn't be fair to reveal anything further.

"Get around on the other side of the engine!" Westy commanded, determination ringing in his tones. "Walk ahead and don't look back once. I got you covered. D'ye get me?"

"Shure, I getcha," the captured one answered sullenly.

As they reached the head of the engine and stepped to cross and go around it, Westy and Rip

got a good view of their prisoner as he passed directly in the path of the powerful searchlight. A typical gunman he was, short of stature, but broad and stockily built, trudging obediently ahead.

These two boy scouts, fearless as they were, would not have meant so much as a feather in his ruffian hands had he but been aware of the extreme youth of his captors. They stepped quickly out of the light lest he should suddenly turn and discover how he was misled. But no, he led the way, groping in the darkness, and Westy felt perfectly confident that he would go on, blindly leading them to the source of the mystery.

Passing under the engine cab the boys could see it was empty, the fireman and engineer both gone. Obviously, there was foul play somewhere and Westy drew a deep breath to heighten his courage.

Nearing the second mail car, they perceived a chink of light shining through the aperture and the distinct hum of voices inside. At this juncture the boys both whispered a warning to their captive, Westy pushing the gun against his back.

"Tell them to open up, and if you let out one squeak——!" He left the sentence unfinished purposely.

The gunman nodded assent and rapped his knuckles against the door. A subdued silence prevailed and then a shuffle of feet.

"Zat you, Bull?" came from behind the door.

"Yeh, 's me! Say——!"

Westy pushed the gun closer and Bull wriggled uncomfortably.

"Say, open up, will youse? I gotta put youse hip to sometin!"

As the door slid open slowly, throwing the light about the darkened area where they were standing, Westy and Rip jumped quickly and quietly back into the protecting shadows.

CHAPTER V

A STEP TO GLORY?

"THROW 'em down and out here quick!" Westy called out of the night.

Three guns immediately came tumbling out on the ground and within a few feet of each other. Their former owners were using violent language in deference to Bull and accusing him of being a stool pigeon, while he vainly protested his innocence.

Westy whispered something to Rip and resumed his authoritative manner.

"Get up there, you, Bull, and line up with the gang in the back of that car!"

Very submissively he ambled up and the gang obediently moved backward. Westy and Rip gathered up the guns hastily and fairly leaped inside the car, a revolver in each hand. Their captives gasped with astonishment, giving one another, particularly Bull, a look of total disgust.

The three mail clerks and the fireman and engineer, all bound and gagged, were sitting on the floor

in a row. They presented a pitiful yet humorous spectacle, sitting there in such dejected-looking attitudes.

Westy viewed the scene hurriedly. Mail was strewn about the whole car in their frenzy to get what they wanted and depart. He looked the line of gunmen over and picked out the biggest and toughest one of the lot.

"Hey, you big boy, step around and relieve those fellows of all that linen!"

There was a perceptible movement on the part of Bull just then to make a plunge at Westy, whose attention he thought was centered upon the big bandit cutting the ties that bound the victims. He moved no further than a foot, however, for the alert scout had pulled the trigger deftly and before any one realized what had happened, the bullet winged its way clean through the crown of Bull's brown fedora hat and landed straight in the niche that held the first-class mail for Larned.

"Score one for Uncle Jeb!" Westy said proudly. "It took me three weeks to learn that." It is needless to say that in view of his marksmanship no one had any desire to show him further resistance.

When the poor victims were released and before

they had sufficiently regained their composure, a conductor appeared on the scene, on his way to the engine to inquire the cause of delay. He immediately gave the alarm to the other train employees, taking care not to arouse the passengers.

Westy and Rip presented the guns to the perspiring clerks and during the excitement that followed with the bandits being securely placed under subjection, the boys slipped out unnoticed.

"Say, how do you get that way, Wes?" Rip's disappointment was evident.

"What way?"

"Why, skipping away like that just when things were warming up nice. You remind me of one of those birds who get up in the theater at the beginning of the last act and steps all over your feet in his frenzy to be the first one out. He don't want to see any more and he don't want you to see any more, either. One of those nice accommodating fellows. I always like to see the whole show, close-up and all!"

"So do I!"

"Well, Jumping Jiminy, why didn't you stay then?"

"Why, you half-baked ham, can't you guess?"

"No, I never was good at riddles. Why?"

"If your Uncle found out about this, the rest of the summer would be spoiled. Keep mum about it whatever you do!"

"Oh, I'll keep it under my hat all right, but he's sure to find it out somehow."

"How? We get off this train in a few hours, you simp! Neither the conductor on our car nor the porter saw us. They were just going in the mail car as we slipped out, for I watched closely. Mr. Wilde will hear about it, sure he will. But he couldn't prove it was us after we get off. We probably aren't the only two boys on this outfit."

"I get you on that point and of course I won't make a slip, but I can't see where it would be so awful if he did hear about it."

"You can't? All right! If you want to run around all summer encased in one of those little horsey reins with bells on like they put on boy babies to keep them from running away when they're first learning to walk, why we'll turn back right now and see the rest of the show. What do you say?"

"Not a darned thing!"

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

THE porter had given them two calls and each time Westy and Rip dozed off again. Then when they were within ten minutes of their destination, Mr. Wilde had to pull the bed clothes off to get them up.

"What are you kids thinking of, anyhow? Do you think the railroad's so kind-hearted as to allow their trains to stand at the station and give you time to leisurely dress before you get off. Railroads aren't run that way. We'll be in exactly nine minutes from now, so snap into it!"

When the two dilatory scouts collided over the same wash-basin four minutes later, the smoking room was filled with men talking loudly about a holdup on the mail car the night before.

Mr. Wilde and Billy were discussing it with the porter who was excitedly reciting the full details to his listeners.

Westy and Rip, employing tooth-brushes with unusual diligence, gave one another a very significant look. About Westy's right eye was the faintest suggestion of a wink. Three minutes later they were standing on the outer platform surrounded by their luggage and facing the door whose lever wouldn't work the night before, in the interests of Fate.

They were all mightily glad to get out in the open again under blue skies and warm sunshine, the air redolent of sweet smelling earth, moist from the heavy rains.

Their outfit was there to meet them, a big high-powered car and a trailer with all the camp equipment. While Mr. Wilde and Billy conferred with the driver of the car, Westy and Rip watched the train take the curve like a flash, and disappear, leaving nothing but a curl of smoke in its wake.

An hour or so later, speeding along a modernly paved highway, the scouts listened intently to Billy as he repeated the hold-up story to the driver.

"It's funny," commented Mr. Wilde, occupying the back seat with the scouts, "that not one of the conductors or porters thought to investigate the cause of the train stopping so abruptly."

"No," replied Billy, "it wasn't unusual at all, be-

cause the conductor on our car told me the train always stopped around there at that time to give Number Thirty the right of way. He said, of course, they hadn't been in the habit of stopping right there exactly—about two miles further on was the usual place. The fact that they had used the emergency brake didn't arouse any suspicion at first, on account of the storm. They thought perhaps the engineer had stopped on signal."

"Well, how did he come to stop at all?"

"The bandits, of course. They gave him the signal and naturally he stopped quick. He had not taken his hand off the throttle before the gunmen covered him and also the fireman. The other two had overpowered the mail clerks by the time their pals joined them. The reason they marched the fireman and engineer along to the car was the fear of discovery and the desire to keep all their victims together. Then the one acted as lookout and he had just about made his rounds of the entire train thinking all was well, when these two unknown kids came up in back of him on the left side of the engine.

"He told it himself, afterward, that he was stricken dumb; never even heard them. Thought it was a couple of the conductors all along until they

disarmed the whole bunch. Nervy kids all right, eh? Some thriller to have missed. Just my luck that I sleep so sound."

"Who were the kids?" Mr. Wilde asked placidly.

"They don't seem to know. During the excitement they must have slipped away unnoticed and no one was able to even give a good description of them. The conductor thought it might have been some one from the country around, but I doubt it on a stormy night like that."

"The site of old Fort Zarah just ahead, sir!" the driver addressed Mr. Wilde.

"Whew!" Westy was thankful for that interruption. He was glad that he had been thoughtful enough to close the door when they sneaked back to the car. He wondered if Rip was thinking the same thing, so he very deftly nudged him in the ribs with his elbow and presently the nudge was fully returned. Then they rode along in silence for a while admiring the country's beauty.

"Was any one hurt?" the driver inquired.

"No!" answered Billy pleasantly. "The fireman and engineer were pretty sore about the head. The bandits got real playful with them and knocked their heads a few times with the butts of the guns for get-

ting a little balky. The engineer said that was the third time they'd been held up in the course of a few years. Three times is one time too many, eh?"

"I should say," Mr. Wilde interrupted, and in the process of lighting another cigar, chuckled: "Quite a contrast in the type of these bandits from their predecessors of 'Forty-nine. They weren't even considerate enough then to leave them with a sore head. They were so greedy they took scalp and all along home to remember their victims by, they thought so much of them. Then in after years when amusements were hard to find and time hung heavy on their hands, they could look at these rare mementos of a bright, hilarious past and shake venerable beards in gestures betokening their great longing for the return of the good old days, when scalps could be had for the asking. No, sir, I can't for the life of me see what the engineer has to kick about at that. He ought to thank the present-day generation for turning out such nice, considerate gunmen."

They went on, passing hamlet after hamlet, town after town, and back into the open prairie again. A perfect summer day!

"I'd like to go into Unk's business," Rip said suddenly, "when I get older."

"How's that?" answered Westy. "I thought you said you'd like to be a fireman on the A. T. and S. F!"

"I thought I would at first, but I've changed my mind."

"Why?"

"Aw, because they have to work nights sometimes!"

CHAPTER VII

IMAGINATION

AT the start Westy and Rip's interest was keenly aroused. They were stopping at places often and long enough to keep them from getting bored. Places that were rich in tradition failed to strike them very forcibly, it seemed. Helping out here and there it filled in time and they also posed at intervals to make the scenes abound with the human touch.

To boys craving adventure, it was just a daily routine of shooting scenes along a highway that occasionally ran through towns and hamlets of various sizes and descriptions. Nothing exciting about it, Westy mused. An old trail, it might have been once, but a plain, everyday, modern-looking highway now. Time had indeed spoiled everything for him, that was certain.

They had left the town of Great Bend in the distance after spending the morning there taking pictures of the Court House Square, through which place the Old Trail had run in its palmy days.

"What good does it do, Unk?" asked Rip, whose

thoughts were following the same trend as Westy's, "to take pictures like the one in Great Bend? How can people be interested in what's there now? They can't tell from that what the Old Trail really looked like. I know I couldn't."

"Do you know why you couldn't, Rip?"

"No. Why?"

"Because you lack one of the greatest assets or gifts, call it what you like, that life could possibly endow a human being with. That gift is commonly called Imagination."

"Each little hill and dell hereabouts"—Mr. Wilde swept his arms wide, indicating that he was taking the entire country surrounding them as an example—"has its own tale of adventure and romance to tell, if we have the mental capacity to draw out these tales from the dumb silence of their unspoken words and hidden secrets. A silence that reveals itself. Do you comprehend my meaning?"

"Silence speaks only to those who are willing to listen. Imagination, if you want to call it such, but my theory is that any one who is highly spiritually attuned can hear the heart throbs in a pile of rock and detect the anguish in the tinkling murmur of a mountain brook.

"Why do people flock to see these pictures and landmarks that are but poor imitations of this once glorious Trail? Why? Because the sub-titles will inform them that on the site of what is now the Court House Square in the town of Great Bend the Old Trail ran through. And on that very spot occurred the terrible fight of Captains Booth and Hallowell in eighteen hundred and sixty-four. What happens? They absorb the seed and with plenty of fertility Imagination becomes a budding flower. That gift enables them to visualize from that peaceful picture another scene depicting a bloody encounter. Or, again, as the film unwinds a plateau is pictured with a herd of cows grazing and lying on its grassy slopes in the late twilight. That which was once famous as the battleground of a terrible conflict between the Pawnees and Cheyennes is now being used as a corral for cattle.

"Does that knowledge so lucidly pictured before them detract one bit from the glamor and charm that is Adventure and Romance and which even the ravages of Time cannot mellow?

"Not if they have imagination! Try it on your piano some time!"

CHAPTER VIII

A REAL FIND

MILE after mile they covered and still the snow-clad peaks of the Raton Range seemed as elusive as the will-o'-the-wisp.

The next morning, however, the outlines of the base became more perceptible as they drew nearer. At first sight it had a dark, grim look in the early morning light, a noticeable contrast to the green pastoral beauty of the foothills.

They were going to take some pictures of the summit and Mr. Wilde looked critically up at the crest that loomed before them now like a lighthouse in the heavens. He mentioned that they were going to foot it after they struck the base and they wouldn't be riding again for at least a couple of weeks.

That statement was very gratifying to the boys. They experienced a thrill in the freedom they would have roaming about at will for the first time since they started. In short, they sat up and took notice immediately.

To Westy the mountains and the smell of pine and the camp-fire at night were alluring. There never was bacon that tasted like the bacon fried over hot coals and no kitchen range ever boiled or percolated coffee as redolent as the coffee that was boiled in the Great Outdoors.

"Gee, it's a pip of a day!" Westy was full of enthusiastic anticipation.

"Yeh, could be much worse!" Rip said gloomily.

"Aw, quit the crêpe-hanging, Rip! We'll get a kick out of something if it's only one of the mules."

That afternoon they ascended the range and little by little the dark stretch of the base beneath them disappeared and the light seemed brighter with each forward step. Billy suggested that they look out for a good camping spot as they were reaching just about the right location to start out from each day and return to at night without having to move their stuff on all the time.

They were going along the main trail all the time and Westy mentioned that they would have to find a spot near a brook. Where else would they get their water? There was a little narrow path that ran between the thickly grown trees to their left. While Mr. Wilde and Billy were arguing about the

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best place to stop, the true scout did a little scouting on his own and followed the path for a while. He wasn't walking more than five minutes when he came out to a place that had once been a clearing, but was now moss-grown and weedy. But joy of joys, there was an old dilapidated cabin with most of the windows broken, but seemingly a good substantial roof and a chimney that revealed the presence of an open fireplace within.

As he opened the creaking door whose hinges were thick in the rust of disuse, Westy realized that no human feet had crossed its threshold for many years past. A table of home-made manufacture stood in the center of the cabin and there were berths built on each side of the fireplace; four in all. Just made to order, Westy thought as he glanced through the broken window near the back. A brook was running merrily back of it about the distance of a long city block away. He hurried back to tell the news of his lucky find.

"I suppose you would never have come across that place if you weren't a scout," Mr. Wilde kidded him.

"A scout is observant!" Westy reminded him.

CHAPTER IX

LOLA

"WELL, I'll say you are, anyway," Mr. Wilde said, as he viewed the place with a satisfied air. "It's like manna in the wilderness to get a bunking-in place like this. I never was fond of sleeping in damp tents and I'm too blamed old to acclimatize myself to that sort of thing now. Bless your lil heart, Westy, my lad, you have all the so-called mascots beaten by a mile when it comes to being of service!"

"A scout is helpful!" Westy said proudly.

"All right, then get some supper and show us what you can do!" Billy demanded, feigning seriousness.

Westy decided to do the cooking and let Rip do the menial chores about and so break him in right. He ordered Rip to run down to the brook and get some water. He sauntered on down very leisurely and splashed the cool water about for some time before he decided to return.

Just as he turned away from the brook to go back he felt instinctively the presence of some one

near him. Glancing around, he saw nothing. Then he looked upward and something moved in the refractory light shining through the gaunt-limbed trees. Breathless, he fled. His uncle sensed something amiss as he ran toward them.

"Gee, you know, Unk, strike me pink if I didn't see a girl sitting up in a tree down there. Looks to me like an Indian, s' help me Sam!"

"You're one heck of a scout, you are," Mr. Wilde chided him, "running away from a poor helpless Indian girl. What in thunder were you afraid of?"

"Aw, I wasn't afraid of her at all, I was just taken off my feet when I saw it was a girl. I don't like 'em much, anyway. That is, most of 'em!"

"Of course not," Mr. Wilde said with mock sympathy, and as an afterthought added, "Not until you get a little older! Come on, we'll take a stroll down and inquire who this maid of the mountains happens to be."

Westy left his bacon to an unknown Fate and followed the rest to the brook, where they beheld Rip's dryad sitting, feet under her, on the limb of a huge tree.

The setting sun threw a halo of scarlet around her. Bobbed hair, dark and straight, with a band of crim-

son ribbon encircling her forehead. Eyes as dark as the forests at night with a laughing light in them. Her small face and strong looking arms were tanned. They could see at first glance that here was a child of the open spaces.

A girl of about thirteen, they judged, when she slipped out of the tree as noiselessly as a wildcat and stood before them slim and tall for her age.

One *would* gather at first that she was an Indian, until she smiled at them one and all, sweetly yet fearlessly.

"How do you do!" Mr. Wilde said, as he bowed graciously. "My name is Madison Wilde, young lady! Who, may I ask, are you?"

She laughed gayly at Mr. Wilde's mock gallantry, and her voice echoed like a silver bell ringing throughout the forest.

"Why—I'm a girl called Lola!"

CHAPTER X

ON THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

"So you're Lola, are you, and not some ephemeral wood-sprite that disappears with the advent of dawn? I feel disappointed that you cannot truthfully tell me you're home is the trunk of the tree and that you sip the nectar from the flowers as your sole diet. Now that you're really a human being we will have to make the best of it. I suppose you live near here?"

She pointed a slim brown finger southward where a column of smoke was curling high above the clump of evergreen pines and tall straight cedars beyond.

"I wonder," she said, showing two rows of even white teeth, "if you gentlemen would take supper with us?" Manifestly, this was inclusive of all.

With all her feminine sweetness there was nothing coy about her nor her question. She spoke simply but with an amazing frankness, accentuated by the soft deep tones in her voice. A typical tomboy, Mr. Wilde thought.

Westy and Rip liked her at once and the fact that she included them as gentlemen had a marked effect upon this consideration.

"Now, that's kind of you," Mr. Wilde answered, "but we are all pretty tired to-night. We wouldn't make very sociable guests I'm afraid. Besides, the hour is quite late now and for four men to presume upon your mother's kind hospitality would be too much of a good thing."

"Oh, no, not at all. I live alone with my grandmother, my father and mother are dead. It's such a holiday when we have any visitors—it happens so very seldom." She said it with a wistful sadness that touched them. "Are you camping here long?"

"Two weeks at the most. Perhaps we will take advantage of your invitation to-morrow evening if we are still welcome!"

"By all means, Mr. Wilde." She moved away from the spot and extended her hand to each one in turn, acknowledging the introductions. "Our cabin is off the main trail; take the first path to the left. If you could make it in the afternoon I could show you some interesting views for your pictures. Good evening, gentlemen!"

They answered in chorus as she took the path

through the trees, walking erect with long, graceful strides. Just before disappearing around the bend she turned and waved a hearty farewell.

"Gee, that's what I call a regular girl," Rip exploded. "Not pretty, but straight from the shoulder."

"I'll say," Westy exclaimed. "She'd certainly knock the spots out of Bridgeboro's dumb Doras."

"Well, are you kids going to stand there gassing all night while I'm starving to death? Come on with the feed!" This was from Billy, who looked upon life as a continual unwinding of film, interrupted only by the process of eating and sleeping.

Late that night, under a moon not quite full, they sat outside talking over the events of the day.

"I say, Mr. Wilde, how did that girl know about your pictures?"

"I don't know, Westy. It would seem uncanny—her knowing that, only I have a faint idea she saw us before we saw her. Probably when we were unloading our stuff. I hadn't any idea of a human being living around here. Of course, it's perfectly delightful, but inaccessible. I dare say it must be dreadfully lonely for such a spirited girl as she."

About midafternoon of the next day they set out

for Lola's cabin. It was a longer hike than they thought, judging from the distance they had reckoned where the smoke was curling the previous evening.

Presently a clearing appeared just ahead and, reaching it, they beheld the "cabin" as she called it, but really a little cottage, painted white with green trimmings and embowered in flowers of variegated hue. Truly a veritable little paradise in the heart of the mountains.

So sequestered, so cool and peaceful it stood there, with the brook to one side bubbling its hurried way as its crystal waters glistened and sparkled in the sunlight.

Running back of the cottage to the south, the ground ended abruptly in a jagged ledge of rock that looked down into a deep ravine from its dizzy heights.

"I told Grandmother one time that at least we have the distinction of living on the edge of the world!" Lola had come out of the house quietly and noting their evident abstraction in the awe-inspiring depths of the ravine, she had spoken—their very thoughts.

Unconsciously, Westy had made that deduction.

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On the edge of the world! Indeed it was, for the formidable-looking chasm with the mountains rising ever higher to the south seemed to separate the little cottage in its realms of imagination from the world of reality beyond!

CHAPTER XI

MANY YEARS AGO

IN this everyday world of ours, what with the rapid strides that civilization has taken in every direction and the progress of our own generation, we have become cynical and apathetic regarding the ingenuity of mankind.

This fact was never brought to mind so much as on that Sunday afternoon when Westy got his first glimpse of Lola's home. It must represent the love and labor of three quarters of a century and more, he thought, to attain such a triumph against such odds. How these sturdy people had outwitted stubborn Nature, to have made this paradise possible in a wilderness, when all the soil surrounding it even now seemed unwilling to give sustenance to anything save a few hardy trees and lifeless mosses. It was astounding and worthy of praise.

A little arbor had been built to one side of the house and it was here that Lola entertained them. At length her grandmother appeared, Lola introducing her as Mrs. Redmond.

Mr. Wilde could not help noticing that in spite of her simple costume she was a woman of marked aristocratic bearing, welcoming them all in the same soft, deep voice as her granddaughter.

Their hospitality was overwhelming, and in spite of the plainness of the food served at supper, the sweetness and wholesomeness of the two lonely creatures made the meal taste like a king's feast.

Their eager interest about everything in the world outside was pathetic. They encouraged Mr. Wilde and Billy to talk of their work and listened attentively to Westy and Rip talk of the scouts. It was obvious that they did not want to talk of themselves at all, mentioning nothing of their own daily lives and routine.

Westy's heart was filled with pity as he watched Lola's dark eyes widening with interest as she listened to the desultory conversation around the table. She fairly gurgled with delight at times when little touches of humor were added here and there. It was a meal that none of them ever forgot.

After supper was over, the night being so warm, it was suggested that they go outside. The air was heavy with the scent of the flowers and the crooning hum of all the mountain night folk had begun.

Lola and the boys flopped themselves in the cool, thick grass at the feet of the older folks who were sitting in the rough-hewn chairs, bearing all the earmarks of true pioneer handicraft.

"I say, Miss Lola," Westy said suddenly, breaking the spell, "are there any Indians in these woods? The honest-to-goodness kind, I mean!"

He wasn't sure, but Westy imagined that he saw Lola startle at his question and in the faint light from the rising moon he detected a bright flush on her cheeks. Glancing at Mrs. Redmond, he saw that she also wore that same strange look. But then in the next moment Lola seemed to have regained her poise, for she smiled—perhaps a trifle sadly, he thought.

"You must remember, Westy, the red man no longer roams the mountain forests at will, nor does he fish in the streams unmolested that were once his by the divine right of Providence. The government sees to it that the Indian makes his home where the white man wishes him to make his home. They are now herded together, these once proud red men, like cattle and their freedom is as limited. The white man has wished it so!"

To say that they were startled at this speech from

so young a girl was putting it mildly. They were amazed and no one missed the bitterness that infused her outburst.

"Gee, I know, you sure are right—there, Miss Lola," Westy said sympathetically. "I've always thought it a darn shame to coup them up. They wouldn't do any harm now, that's a cinch!"

"I have often wondered myself," Mr. Wilde put in, "wherein the fault did really lie in the beginning. It is true after all I suppose that the white man has been more or less of a thief, too. He took away their land at the start and then snatched from them the very birthright of every red man—his freedom. It is a fact to be deplored by the white man, really!"

Both Lola and her grandmother seemed to be looking back into the past, so grave were they in their meditation.

"Would you like to hear a long story, gentlemen?" Lola said inquiringly.

The very silence spoke consent.

In the realms of imagination they sat, waiting for Lola to begin. The moon broke full through the dark, star-flecked heavens as an elfin breeze stirred the sleeping flowers, wafting their heavy languorous perfume through the air. The cry of some dis-

tant night-prowler pierced the stillness and she looked away where the black shadows hid the deep ravine from view. With her face uplifted to the moonlight, her lips parted slowly:

“Many years ago——”

CHAPTER XII

JUST A FEW

"WHEN the Moon of the Snow Shoes had come upon the prairies, the North Wind, cruel and merciless, blew its stinging fury in the faces of the red men. Ice and snow covered the earth, spreading itself like a huge blanket.

"Months passed and still no sunrise nor sunset could penetrate the frozen ground beneath its icy coverlet. The moon and stars each night looked down upon a silent, shivering world.

"The owl in the forest, the birds from the north-land; all living things were rendered inanimate by the wrath of the Ice-god who ruled the plains that winter.

"When the early spring should have caused the sap to run in the trees, making ready to burst forth the tiny buds, still nothing stirred. Even the sun was implacable, withholding its warmth and brightness from the pleading earth.

"Day was as night, with the dark clouds hiding

the blue of the heavens and the mantle of white still draping the whole world beneath.

"Death, stark and grim, hovered over the wigwams of the red men and the cabins of the white man. Suffering, sorrow and hunger were everywhere, recognizing no creeds nor classes.

"Then, when the spring was late and his purpose accomplished, this harbinger of all that was Misery and Gloom, stole subtly away into the night, giving way to a day that brought sunshine and new hope.

"On that day a band of braves were returning to the lands of their fathers', having wearied of waiting for the ice to break and had ventured forth to hunt. Turning back with much rejoicing and provisions, they hurried homeward. Thankful, they were, these warriors of the Cheyennes, that the God of the Sun was shining once more upon their people.

"Their leader, in the course of their journey, sighted a lone tepee standing in the heart of the prairie wilderness.

"Bold and brave though they were, the scene that they beheld upon entering the wigwam caused them great anguish. A scene of past suffering and desolation it had been.

"In the center of the lone tepee sat an Indian chief

attired in his full splendor. Kneeling, as in an attitude of prayer, his squaw, her head resting in his lap and her hands clasped before her, was found. They had either frozen or starved to death.

"While deploring this tragedy, they heard a faint cry and found a tiny cradle with a girl babe inside, just on the borderland. They fought for many hours to keep the spark kindled, and after hope was almost gone—it came back—to live.

"With due ceremony the babe's royal father and mother were started on the way to the Happy Hunting Grounds and the braves set out again with the tiny princess, bearing it tenderly home.

"The whole tribe came out to welcome this little daughter of an unknown chief and she was given to Black Waters, tribal chief and very powerful.

"A feast, very joyful, was held that night and the girl babe was named in honor of her finding—alone with Death.

"Lone Star, they called the babe, and she, gentlemen, was my great-grandmother!"

CHAPTER XIII

PAGES

"THE years went by swiftly and Lone Star grew into girlhood. Adored by her foster father and his squaw, Singing Bird, her precocious wisdom soon made itself manifest among the tribe.

"Peace-loving, gentle and tolerant, Lone Star exercised great influence over Black Waters, and the Cheyennes lived many, many moons contented and at peace with even their hereditary enemies.

"Under her tuition a plea was sent to the white man by Black Waters, asking them not to entice their warriors with fire-water. On the whole, this plea was respected except by those unprincipled enough to make use of the Indians' ignorance when their brains were befuddled with liquor. Braves were prohibited from indulging and to those whose behavior lapsed from this rule, punishment was meted accordingly.

"The Cheyennes were not inherently peace-loving and a time came when they chafed under their sub-

jection and longed for war paint and feathers again.

"Lone Star's serenity was a source of bitterness to the restless braves. Their dislike for her deepened into hate, but they dared not voice this openly in fear of incurring Black Waters' wrath.

"Young maidenhood found her the virtual ruler of the tribe. Black Waters was getting quite feeble in body, but nevertheless still strong in mind. Then one day when Singing Bird and Lone Star were absent a tragedy occurred.

"Black Waters was slain by some mysterious enemy, a poisoned arrow having found its way into the heart that had known such great love for the waif of the prairies.

"Her grief was unappeasable and with Black Waters' squaw she went into seclusion for a time.

"A new chief was ruling the domain upon Lone Star's return. Ruling it contrary to all that she had taught them in her labors of love; for she had grown to love the people of her adoption.

"She and Singing Bird were given a new tepee, but a very cold welcome. It was alongside that of the new ruler, and one evening as she sat outside in the shadows, quite accidentally she overheard a plot. It was being discussed between some braves and the

Chief himself who were obviously victims of the white man's fire-water.

"The plan was to rob the stage coach on its regular run to Santa Fe. One of the tribe had secured the information and reported to his chief that much loot would be secured if the attack was carried out successfully.

"Lone Star deplored this and straightway entered the wigwam, protesting against breaking the long period of peace that they all had shared. Her pleading was all in vain and she was immediately made a prisoner in her own wigwam to prevent any further recurrence of intruding into their affairs. It was understood that she wasn't to have her freedom until the robbery was over.

"The next morning, goaded on by the highly spirited alcohol, the warriors set forth at dawn for the Old Santa Fe Trail to await their victims at Old Point of Rocks.

"The next day went by and then as the last red glow of evening gave way to the night they returned, victorious and triumphant, bringing with them the fruits of the victory and two male prisoners.

"They were both young men who had been successful in gold mining and on their way to visit in

Santa Fe. That they had been saved was due to the unusual bravery displayed by the one—an English gentleman. The fact that the other was his dearest friend and partner saved him also. The red man, admiring bravery more than a life, spared them and brought them back to their tribe for further consultation.

“The chief, a man inclined to malevolence and also wishing to taunt her, demanded that Lone Star come forth to view his prisoners.

“Head erect and eyes flashing proudly, she came. Tossing her raven hair defiantly, she faced them one and all and then glanced at the captives with pity.

“As her eyes met those of the Englishman, the shadows of her life seemed to steal away—for in the light of his eyes was the Light of the World.

“The Englishman, gentlemen, was John Redmond, my great-grandfather!”

CHAPTER XIV

OUT

"THE days and nights that followed were a period of torment, not only to the white men, but to Lone Star also as a result of her open display of pity for them. She was forced daily to witness certain forms of torture inflicted upon the prisoners.

"John Redmond bore these tortures without flinching, even daring to smile between times upon Lone Star's anguished face, as if to reassure her that it was nothing. Paul Mitchell, his friend and partner, was not quite as resolute in bearing these inflicted sufferings. Each new trend these tortures were taking seemed but to increase his anger and resentment toward the Indian maiden. He hated the warriors that were enjoying his pain, but most of all he hated her for having been the direct cause which instigated the red men in these deeds.

"After some days Lone Star learned from Singing Bird that in order to punish her completely the Cheyennes were going to put the young men to

death in her presence on the dawn of a certain day.

"Thereupon a plan was made and late that night she succeeded in getting one of the boys who was guarding the prisoners to allow her to go in the wigwam on the pretense that she wished to give them some food.

"Her ruse was successful and she revealed to them how she intended to help them escape. Redmond was overjoyed and admired her daring. Mitchell also was thankful in the anticipation of his freedom, but viewed with disfavor the attachment between his friend and the Indian maid. Notwithstanding that she was risking her own life in helping him, too, he never lost his resentment for her and as long as he lived he didn't even try to forgive or forget.

"As the time approached when they were to escape, Redmond mentioned that he intended carrying Lone Star off with them. Mitchell was terribly angered on hearing this, but to all his pleas his friend turned a deaf ear.

"In the dark of a moonless night, Lone Star and Singing Bird waited for them with their ponies, at a place not far from the Indian camp. The discovery of the young men's escape they knew would be made just about the time the two women were re-

turning and that, of course, would mean exposure and certain death for them. So they valiantly determined to flee after the white men had gotten safely away. They would outlaw themselves rather than return to their people as traitors—and Death.

“A sound of dried leaves being trod upon warned them that Redmond and Mitchell were safe from their enemies—so far. Then they appeared through the trees.

“Without a word being spoken, the women motioned the young men to mount quickly as time fled. And then Redmond with an imperious gesture demanded Lone Star to mount the pony with Mitchell, for which act this gentleman straightway swore to retaliate.

“Singing Bird and Redmond on the other pony led the way to freedom and struck out for the Old Santa Fe Trail, and before the sun had set that evening they had put great distance between their enemies and themselves.

“They stopped to rest for the night, feeling sure of being safe from any pursuers. While Redmond went to a near-by stream and got some fish for the evening meal, Mitchell, with malice hidden under his smiling countenance, gravely told Lone Star

that John Redmond had secreted upon his person a paper that represented great wealth. He told her that in the event of encountering another attack or robbery it would be safer in his interests for her to have it. If she cared about his safety, he told her, she would manage to get it that very night while he slept and hide it under the bright band that held her thick hair in place. If she wanted to save him from any more robberies like the one her people had just perpetrated upon them, this act would save him.

"In the depths of her trusting heart she believed him, and that night accomplished her purpose, thinking it a deed of much loyalty.

"When the dawn came, penciling the gray horizon with streaks of pinkish hue, Lone Star awakened to find her beloved Singing Bird ill and suffering intensely. Awakening Redmond, they both discovered that Mitchell was nowhere about. Thinking he had gone to the spring to refresh himself, they awaited his return.

"A half hour, then an hour, elapsed and still no sign of him anywhere. Becoming alarmed, they hurried to the spot where the ponies had been tied the evening before. Where they had left two ponies

grazing contentedly in the lingering summer twilight, there was now only one.

"John Redmond uttered a cry of bewilderment and the truth of the matter came vividly to Lone Star as she raised her hand to her forehead.

"The paper was gone!"

CHAPTER XV

OF THE PAST

LOLA had evidently finished her tale. She still sat unmoved, hands clasped idly in her lap and staring out into blank space. Her physical being was there, living and breathing the same as they, but Westy thought that her spirit was somewhere in the Great Beyond with Lone Star.

"My dear child," Mr. Wilde said finally, "we are waiting to hear the rest of your story. You've left the best part untold, haven't you?"

"You mean the hardest part," she answered; "for them, at least it must have been! There isn't much more to tell except that Lone Star confessed to John Redmond her innocent theft and how Paul Mitchell had duped her.

"Singing Bird being in such a precarious condition and with only one pony, their progress was exceedingly slow. All along the way their dangers were manifold and one day a stage coach overtook them. They were overjoyed, of course, but their joy was

short lived, as there wasn't any available room for them.

"One of the occupants was a padre from the mission in Santa Fe, so on the Old Trail right at the threshold of the mountains which had become hallowed with the blood and martyrdom of many brave men, Lone Star and John Redmond joined their hearts and hands.

"The passengers did all they could for Singing Bird and, being helpless to do more, went on their way. Putting the old woman on the pony's back, this fearless maid and man stood for a moment watching.

"Hands tightly clasped, they looked where the coach was disappearing around a bend in the Trail. When they couldn't see it longer, they listened, the pounding of the horses' hoofs resounding along the highway and the friendly creak of the wheels sounding like music to their ears. On and on they went, riding into the sunset and out of their lives.

"Singing Bird died when they reached these mountains. In searching for a place to give her burial they came across a deserted cabin standing where our cottage is now.

"Whether it was that they were weary or disillusioned,

sioned and skeptical of all mankind through Paul Mitchell's act, I do not know. At all events they decided to live their lives alone and unmolested, and stayed on here, enduring terrible hardships in their endeavors to make possible this little garden spot as a retreat from all the world.

"One son was born to them, who afterward married an English girl, his second cousin, and now my grandmother. They also stayed on here with the parents and in the due course of time a son was born to them—my father.

"In his young manhood he brought to the home of his fathers' a young bride of gentle bearing whose forefathers had also fought and triumphed over great odds on the Old Trail.

"They, too, stayed on, building the old cabin anew and at my birth my mother died. My father was deeply grieved and when the war came he went to France—never to return. Like his grandfather who had lived bravely—he died bravely.

"John Redmond and Lone Star passed out of this life within a few minutes of one another—loyal even unto Death. Unhappily, I do not remember them; they died when I was an infant.

"After my father's death in France my grand-

father also left this life and they are all lying peacefully over there on the hillside."

She waved her hand to the right, where four little white stones on a grassy slope stood out visibly in the bright moonlight.

"Just grandmother and I now—that is all, dear friends, for you have just heard a tale of three generations."

CHAPTER XVI

THOUGHTS

LATE that night when they got back to the little shack every one was sleepy enough to turn in. Long after Mr. Wilde and Billy had entered the somnolent state, Westy and Rip lay wide awake, eyes boring the darkness, and thinking.

Lola's story had deeply affected them all, but in the boys it had so stimulated their interest that they lay pondering the whole thing as she told it from beginning to end. Westy had a thought and he just couldn't keep it until morning.

"Hey, Rip, watcha doing?" he said softly.

"Pickin' flowers in the Sahara!"

"Say, now, I'm serious!"

"You always are. What in heck do you want now?"

"I've just been thinking——"

"You don't do anything but think. I don't see that it gets you anywhere. Look at those bandits, for instance——"

"Shush! Are you out of your mind?"

"Don't shush me! Anyhow, do you think I'm a boob? If you did something else besides thinking you'd a-heard. Unk and Billy sound like a couple of steam shovels already. They can't hear!"

"All right, but there's no use of spilling the beans now and crying the blues, too. We can't get credit for everything, can we?"

"No, you won long before you started."

"What I started to tell you was: Do you think there's been a part of Lola's story left out? On purpose, I mean!"

"How do I know! I'm not a mind reader."

"Well, I'm convinced there was."

"Yes?"

"Of course. Do you remember her telling about that Mitchell chap?"

"Yeh, what about him?"

"Well, she never said what became of him, nor if they ever tried to locate him. It would be interesting to know where he went. He certainly must have copped all the gold that belonged to Redmond. Didn't she say something about the paper representing great wealth?"

"Sure!" Rip was getting very drowsy and half heard Westy's question.

"Well, there you are. He must have had half interest with that Mitchell in the mine. A gold mine! Think of it! Gee, they ought to be rich, eh, Rip?"

"Sure! Huh!"

"But they're not! That's where the mystery of it comes in. They must be terribly poor or they wouldn't be living that way. Lola talks well—but then her grandmother educated her most likely. I can't get it out of my head that there's a nigger in the woodpile somewhere. Gee, I'd like to get up the courage to ask her what else she knows, wouldn't you?"

There was a protracted silence and when Rip did answer it seemed to come from afar.

"Sh-sh-ure!"

"Can't you say anything but *sure*?"

"Sure! Good-night!"

CHAPTER XVII

A LAKE BEWITCHED

THE next morning early, the Educational Film squad set out early to meet Lola, who had promised to show them some of the beauties of Raton Range that no one but a native of the mountains would be cognizant of.

Lola, Westy and Rip walked ahead chatting gayly. Up narrow paths they went single file. Paths that were partially hidden with underbrush and had felt the tread of many generations of mankind, both red and white, were now overgrown from disuse.

Above them the barren-coned peaks rose high into the cloudless blue, and the weird-shaped forms stood like sentinels guarding the miles of untracked mountain wilderness.

After lunch Lola led the way out of a narrow ravine, up ever higher, and thence out on a broad terrace. Brilliant Alpine plants and flaming cactus were growing in profusion, and further on they came to a lake gleaming like a mirror in the afternoon sun.

On all three sides of it were towering cliffs covered with pine and great piles of gray rock.

On one side of the lake, directly opposite them, straight upwards from the water's edge, a cliff was indented in places like a narrow stairway and ended abruptly in what looked to be a depression from where they stood. It attracted the onlooker at once by virtue of this peculiarity.

Where the other cliffs had piled their growth of rock until they seemed to merge themselves with the white-capped crest of the Range this one resembled a dwarfed step-sister, stunted and despised by its loftier kin.

The younger members of the party sat down at the edge of the lake, while Billy and Mr. Wilde maneuvered around for some good scenes. Then they went back a way to the broad terrace and left them to their own interests for awhile.

Rip was talking loudly and skipping some stones in the lake. It was this that Westy thought at first made the sounds he was hearing. But he heard it again, and again, whenever Rip lowered his voice or when Lola answered.

"What's that noise, I wonder?"

"What noise?" Rip inquired.

"I don't know what it is, that's why I'm asking you. Can't you hear it?"

"No! You're crazy!"

"Well, quit talking for five minutes and you'll hear some sounds besides your own!"

They all sat quiet for a few minutes and it came again; a sound like thousands of bees droning their delight in a world overflowing with nectar. Sometimes it would gradually lessen and die away slowly against the rock-ribbed cliffs, like the finale of an organ's peal, echoing and reëchoing in the dim recesses of an old cathedral. Then it would start again, the same as before. It was weird.

Westy looked to Lola, a question half formed on his lips. She was smiling.

"What's the joke?"

"I forgot to mention it before," she said simply.

"What?"

"Only that there's a legend connected with this place. The lake supposedly is bewitched and the stunted cliff you see up there is haunted!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LEGEND OF DEATH RIVER

"Aw, go on!" gasped the skeptical Rip. "Who says it's haunted?"

"I don't know who started it," Lola answered complacently, "but people around here have believed it for many hundreds of years. I could neither deny nor affirm it, never having been in or on the lake or up there."

The romantic and adventurous Westy was thrilled to the utmost. He had fairly hung on Lola's every word.

"If they say it is, *it is!*" he cried with emphasis, and believed it because he wanted to believe it.

"Well, maybe it is, but you've got to go some to make me believe it, I know that!" Rip was defiant. "Anyhow, if it's only a legend, why should we have to swallow it? People in those days were likely to believe everything. They didn't have anything else on their minds! Why, gee whiz, look at those times

when the poor dubs practiced witchcraft. Would you believe that now? Huh, I guess not! Then why fall for this kind of stuff? Not a bit of difference between witchcraft and haunted places. It's all bunk!" Rip was panting for breath.

"Mr. Smarty!" Westy put in, "I hope you're resting easier with that off your chest! And I'll tell you one thing, if you call yourself a gentleman, I don't! Arguing with a lady—you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Weren't you brought up to believe everything a lady tells you? and if you don't to keep it to yourself? That's the way I was brought up! Now can the chin music until Lola tells us what it's all about. Go on, Lola!"

"Lone Star told it to my grandmother," she began. "All the old pioneers hereabouts know of it. In fact it had been handed down generation after generation until Black Waters' time and that is how my Indian kin learned it. Of course, they all believe it implicitly—but that is ill to the purpose just now. The story is what you want to hear.

"Ages ago, as we have all been told, the continent of North America was vastly populated by the red man. Whether of the Aztec race or not, it is not known, but at any rate the tribe I am going to tell

you about were cliff dwellers and said to be very intelligent in their way.

"The lake here was then a deep, dangerous river called the River of Death or Death River. It was fed by a gigantic waterfall that came roaring over one of the cliffs yonder. The stream then ran on submerging each little stream in its swift, greedy course. It wanted no tributaries emptying mild waters in its superstrong current. It wanted only itself; its own master and any of those who dared defile these virgin waters were put to death and violently carried downstream and from there emptied into an enormous basin, where the bodies of those who had also dared were devoured by huge fish. That basin is now called Le Purgatoire (The River of Lost Souls) or Purgatory River. Many legends are also told of that river.

"At any rate, the stunted cliff was occupied by this tribe whose homes had been chiseled out of the rock. It was higher than any of the neighboring cliffs and for many, many years they lived there in peace and prosperity.

"The men were stalwart and handsome and their women folk were reputed far and wide to possess extraordinary beauty and grace. Their braves were

lacking however in one thing—prowess in war. They weren't as skillful with the bow and arrow as their contemporaries who roved the plains.

"But their lives were serene. They hunted and fished; their homes were strong and comfortable and they had the River of Death flowing past their very doors to protect them from envious invaders.

"It was true, an enemy could reach them by the long and tortuous trails over the range. But the way was dangerous and would take many moons to travel, so they did not fear this as they well knew the laziness of their brother redskins, who would avoid such a route if they could reach and fight them another way. They preferred paddling their canoes in comfort to stalking over hazardous trails.

"A day came, however, when a distant tribe heard of the serenity, the prosperity and beautiful maidenhood this tribe possessed. This distant tribe were noted for their great skill with the arrow and it was said they could slay a deer on the mountain, aiming from the prairie land below. So the cliff dwellers with their Death River and all could not deter them from setting out to fight them.

"They were tired of their prairie wigwams, exposed to the wintry blasts and the summer suns.

They wanted comfort and determined to take the homes of the cliff dwellers for their own.

"Upon reaching the banks of the River, they called forth a challenge to the warriors of the cliffs. Now, though not skilled in archery, these braves were not cowards and at once answered the challenge of their enemies. The women and children clambered to the top of the cliff and hid back in the safe seclusion of the deep forest.

"Alas, the handsome men of the peaceful tribe were no match for the enemy, who were indescribably ugly and ferocious. After a few days and much fighting between the river's bank and the cliffs, a sunset found them all completely wiped out—victims of the treacherous poisoned arrows of their opponents, who were now shouting with malicious glee the songs of triumph.

"The women and maidens hearing no more shouts from their loved ones came to the edge of the cliff and straightway were weighed down with terrible sorrow. Before their very eyes their braves were being rushed face downward in the terrific currents of Death River, while others had fallen by their own dwellings, which they had fought to protect.

"The enemy tribe then called them to prepare the

homes anew, for they intended to seize the women also. They were going to take the trail over the range, knowing the dangers of the river.

"The women and maidens, aware of the length of time it took to cross the range, set about destroying their possessions. Arising before dawn on the morning that the enemy's arrival was expected, they arrayed themselves in their most beautiful costumes.

"When all were assembled (some two hundred and more) the oldest woman of the tribe began to chant a hymn of death. It was taken up along the line by the older women first, the mothers with their babes and children, the maidens and girls and boys.

"Filled with pathos, the last wailing note lingered long in the air and finally died away in the roaring din of the waterfall. Paying their last homage to the four gods of their fathers, the heavens above, the earth below, the winds and the sea, they cried a prayer of farewell.

"As the approaching dawn flooded the world in a sea of light and as the sun looked silently on, with one accord they flung themselves into the rushing waters below!"

CHAPTER XIX

RIP MAKES HIMSELF HEARD

"SHUT up!" Westy said vehemently and looked meaningly at Rip when Lola paused in her narrative.

"What are you chirping about, Birdie?" Rip came back, surprised. "I didn't say a word yet!"

"Well, you were going to and you can thank me now that you didn't!"

"I'll be darned!" was all that Rip could find suitable to say.

"Do you promise not to quarrel again—either of you, if I finish?" Lola sounded serious.

"Sure, we do!"

"When the enemy reached the cliff that had been so precipitous, their amazement knew no bounds to see that it had been reduced to half its former size and the cliff dwellings a mass of solid gray rock, as if they had never been there at all. Running all the way down to the water's edge, a series of indentations had been formed as if chiseled by a human hand.

"All was as silent and still as the tomb. The great waterfall rushing over the cliff to the west had disappeared as well and the rocky surface that had been wet with the spray for ages was now bone dry in the hot sun.

"Beneath, where the river had swirled and eddied and flowed on as far as the eye could see, was now a small, placid mountain lake, and they sought to penetrate (with their bewildered eyes) all this mystery in its mirror-like depths.

"For *there is mystery* in its depths, say what you like. Looking at its calm surface, you are vastly deceived, because it is said that there are no end of little whirlpools underneath that suck one down to the bottomless depths. Fish cannot live in it; I have seen that proven, and the water is almost hot at times. A singular thing, you know, for a mountain lake."

Westy nodded, eyes wide with wonderment, but Rip, as was to be expected, hadn't flopped entirely yet.

"All right, Lola! So far I don't say I do believe and I don't say I don't." Rip was at least trying to keep within the law governing the status of a gentleman. "What I want to know is, what has

that to do with the whole blooming outfit being haunted?"

"This is where that part comes in," Lola said, quite undaunted. "When the Indian women chanted their death hymn they invoked the God of the Waterfall to punish the enemy tribe for the willful destruction of their braves. Also, they called upon the God of the Forest to make its depths so impenetrable that the cruel redmen would become lost and never find their way out.

"There was a landslide of rock that obliterated the dwellings, after the wholesale sacrifice had been made. And, the forest god, coöperating with the God of the Waterfall, ingeniously devised the natural stairway to entice the warriors down to cross the lake, whose waters became warm to make the snare more alluring.

"Those of the enemy who didn't drown in the lake, which the waterfall is now supposed to be hiding beneath, became lost and died in the jungle that had grown on the cliffs. That forest there is also said to be infested with snakes.

"And so to this day, boys, no man dares entrust himself to the warm waters of the lake, or dares to traverse the forest fastnesses with impunity!"

"Huh!" exclaimed Rip with perfect self-assurance. "I'd like to see any one stop me if I wanted to go!"

"My dear Rip," explained Lola, "I certainly wouldn't try to stop you, but at the same time I surely wouldn't urge you. In all my family history we have known no man who would think of attempting it and I am proud to say they weren't cowards, either. I guess it was that they had enough trouble without going to seek for it."

"Oh, don't listen to him, Lola! He says more than his prayers!" Westy assured her.

"I do, do I?" Rip was plainly aroused.

"Sure!"

"Well, what would you say if I told you I was going in that lake for a darn good swim to-morrow?"

"I'd say you were just a poor nut, and that if you did, it'd be your own funeral!"

CHAPTER XX

SHADOWS OF DOUBT

ON the way home it was pretty plain that Rip was peeved at Westy. He said nothing to either of them and when they left Lola at her cabin he said good-night with the rest, but didn't speak again the rest of the way to their own little shack. There seemed to be a tacit understanding between them, too, that nothing but silence should prevail.

Mr. Wilde and Billy were dog-tired after a long strenuous day, and they were too engrossed in their own affairs to notice anything amiss with the boys. So Westy decided not to mention anything of the haunted cliff and lake that evening.

Rip immediately went to his bunk and pretty soon they all followed suit. As Westy lay in his bunk thinking of his comrade's foolish statement, he heard the cries of a wildcat not far off. Then an owl hooted dismally in the distance and soon he felt the warm delicious drowsiness of sleep enveloping him like a cloak, protecting his senses from the disturbing night noises.

When he arose in the morning every one was up and about. In fact, the faithful Billy and Mr. Wilde bore all the evidences of readiness for departure.

"Say, Westy," Mr. Wilde said on seeing him up, "I didn't call you because there's no hurry for you two kids this morning. Billy and I are going down on the lower range to shoot at some wild plant life and all that kind of bunk. There wouldn't be anything for either of you to do, and it's pretty narrow in some places, Lola tells me, so you're better off keeping the home fires burning. Take a run over and see her this afternoon, why don't you? You two boys are as welcome in that poor kid's lonely life as the rain in the desert, and that reminds me that it looks as though we'll have a drop or two on our noble brows before the day is over, don't you think so, Billy?"

"Uh huh!"

"You mean you don't care whether it does or not, is that it, Billy? Well, come on, we better get along. S'long, Westy!"

"S'long!"

It wasn't until then that Westy became aware of Rip's absence. He looked outside and then concluded that he must have slipped down to the brook

to wash. Westy decided to have breakfast first before he did that very thing also.

He ate slowly and listened to hear Rip's footsteps coming up from the brook.

"I s'pose he's still peeved and is taking his time so he won't have to talk first. Well, he needn't stay away on account of that, because I intended to apologize to him this morning before I was even up. I can't think what I did or said to make him peeved, but it doesn't make any difference what it was—I'll apologize anyhow."

Westy was that kind of a chap.

He gathered up the breakfast dishes and placed them in a neat pile, noting absently by the presence of the fourth cup and plate that at least Rip had not fasted in making his anger complete.

A few minutes later after he had become tired of waiting, Westy trudged leisurely toward the brook and whistled loudly on purpose to warn his friendly enemy of his casual approach.

Whistling as he was, he also was thinking and planning what he would say to Rip when he met him at the brook.

"I'll say to him, when I see him, I'll say just like this: 'Rip, if I said anything yesterday to make you

sore, why I'm darned sorry, yes, sir!' Then I'll say just to make him laugh: 'We'll kiss and make up, how about it?' He's bound to fall for that, I should think."

Hands in his pockets and sauntering nonchalantly toward the little stream, he started another tune, but it stopped abruptly on his lips as he reached there. He looked about wonderingly.

Rip was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XXI

GROWING DEEPER

FOR a second or two Westy was thoroughly alarmed, but soon felt reassured when his eyes fell upon the crystal-like water gurgling against the pearly stones.

"The little rascal, he's gone straight up the brook to Lola's to get away from me!"

With that knowledge under way he hurried back to the cabin to make himself look more presentable in the presence of ladies.

He was tying a little string tie, trying to knot it at just the right angle. In a cracked mirror that was just half its original size, he valiantly tried to accomplish the feat. He could see his face all right without standing on his toes and that notwithstanding his height. Of course, the cracks in the mirror gave him a most grotesque appearance. He really shivered as he viewed his own countenance. It looked so painfully distorted and his nose was cracked in three places. When he stood on his toes to see if

he had tied the knot, all that appeared to his struggling vision was his Adam's apple moving furiously with suppressed rage. So he gave it up and started out without caring another hang about appearances.

It was around ten o'clock when he struck off the main trail for Lola's and it occurred to him that perhaps Rip wouldn't like it, running him down in such a fashion. Rip was funny that way; Westy didn't know exactly how to take him, but he knew this much—that a good deal of the younger boy's skepticism was put on. But still he liked him in spite of that. He wanted the whole world to think he was something he wasn't.

"That's nothing," Westy said aloud, "there are plenty like that lying around loose in the world, and he's just a boy yet. He'll get over it—I hope. I bet he would go up there some time just to show me he was real brave and all the time he would be afraid himself. Lots of heroes have been made of that kind of stuff, too.

"I'll whistle again when I get near the place so he won't think I'm sneaking up on him. Maybe he'll have told Lola he's sore and don't want to see me and beat it down the brook, when he hears me. I won't let on anything about it if she asks me. I

got a good excuse for going there, anyway; Mr. Wilde told me to."

He came to a queer-shaped pine tree that was now familiar in marking the last few hundred feet before coming to the Redmond clearing. He started to whistle and slowed down his gait.

Presently Lola came to the opening and waved to him gayly. He returned the greeting and smiled inwardly to think that Rip was doing the very thing that he expected he would do, and there she was smiling just as though she knew nothing about it. She wanted to be loyal to both of them, Westy mused, and that was the right thing to do.

"'Lo, Westy," she said, beaming. "It's nice to see you this early. Now what could have brought you, I wonder?"

Just like a woman, Westy thought. Giving herself dead away.

"Oh, I don't know," Westy answered indifferently. "Mr. Wilde told me to run over and keep you folks company."

"Isn't that just like him! Do you know, Westy, my grandmother and I are going to miss you all very much when you leave here." She looked away wistfully: "I'd like to see what other cities look like!"

"Have you ever been away from here, Lola?" Westy asked.

"Only to Santa Fe three times; just on short visits. Father took me before he went to France, but I have never been any further. I've seen pictures of cities much bigger than Santa Fe; still I was terribly thrilled when I went there!"

Westy was touched and longed to ask her why they didn't leave their isolated home, but he just couldn't trespass upon her private affairs.

"You must forgive me, though, talking about myself," she continued, "but grandmother and I feel freer to talk with you all. We have never spoken so to any one before. Most people aren't interested in the petty troubles of a mountaineer. You can't blame them, really!"

"Not at all! Why shouldn't we be interested in other people's troubles? A scout should be—particularly!"

"Isn't that fine! Tell me more about them, Westy?"

Westy thought that herein was his chance to be real helpful in their poverty and was thinking how to go about the delicate topic when Mrs. Redmond

came out into the garden and smilingly nodded to him.

"Where's Rip this morning?" she asked.

Westy looked at Lola and her face was a blank as far as he could see. Then she turned to him in an apologetic manner.

"I never asked, did I? I really meant to ask you where he was when you came along. He isn't ill, is he?"

Her expression was so manifestly one of concern that Westy lost his poise for a moment as the memory of Rip's threat flitted through his mind.

"Why, hasn't he been here at *all* this morning?" He couldn't seem to make himself believe it.

"No," Lola said. "We haven't seen him at all. Where do you think he is?"

"I wish I was sure—but then he wouldn't if he did go up there——"

"You mean all his talk of yesterday, don't you? I wouldn't worry about that a bit, Westy. He wouldn't dare go in after all I told him. He's just a little peeved because you didn't urge him. Go on up—you'll find him ready to make up, I guess!"

Westy started on a dog trot and as he disappeared through the trees he called back to her excitedly:

"If he did go in anyway, do you think he'd have any chance——"

She couldn't hear the rest he said for his words were lost in the distance.

CHAPTER XXII

TO THE RESCUE

WESTY wasn't as optimistic as Lola. Stumbling over tree stumps and through underbrush, he continually berated himself for having wasted so much valuable time in talking.

Here and there he could see Rip's tracks in the soft damp earth. The ground must always be damp around there, he thought, for it hadn't rained in the mountains since they arrived four days ago.

In some places through the forest, on the way to the lake, twilight was perpetual, the trees being so thickly clustered that the sunlight was forever barred from penetrating through.

"If I had thought for a minute," Westy said aloud, "that he would really go up there, I'd have told Mr. Wilde this morning. He's one stubborn kid, I'll say. Maybe, though, he'll only go up there and sit around long enough to make me think he carried out his threat. I suppose he'll be hopping mad when I catch him stalling for time."

And so Westy's thoughts rambled on as hurriedly as his feet. He felt that the faster he went the less progress he made and all the while the time was flying.

He figured from the day before how long it would be before he could get there. The middle of the afternoon easy, he reckoned. The sun was at its zenith now and he was mighty hungry. But he didn't care at that, so long as he brought Rip safely back.

For some reason or other, Westy felt a certain parental superiority toward him, notwithstanding the slight difference in their ages. In short, he had a real responsibility where Rip was concerned.

Away to the right through a space where some trees had been felled, he could see the gray cliffs worn shiny and smooth from Time. "At last," he thought, "I'm almost there! I hope he don't fly up when he sees me."

So for the third time that day Westy whistled the warning of his advance. He slowed down as he gained the broad terrace, before cutting around to the lake.

Approaching with his eyes cast on the ground, he waited to hear Rip's voice. Sauntering along

slowly and kicking the earth with his shoe tip in an offhand manner, his heart leaped within him as he spied something on the mossy ground under a near-by tree.

A small pile of clothes he saw and a pair of scout shoes, giving mute evidence of its owner's absence. He dared not turn around for fully a minute, so sure was he of seeing nothing living and breathing in the lake.

Then above the droning hum of the haunted lake he heard a faint sound. He strained every nerve to catch it again and raised his eyes to scan the surface of the water.

He started.

On the further side of the lake an enormous tree that had undoubtedly fallen long ago from some cause or other, hung far out over the water, its branches spread on either side and its huge trunk securely wedged on land between the crevices in the stunted cliff.

Then he saw something move on the surface, right by the tree, and a faint cry rose above the incessant humming.

"Help!"

CHAPTER XXIII

WESTY HAS A STRUGGLE

It was almost inaudible, yet Westy knew the cry to be Rip's. It sounded exhausted, too, so there was no time to be lost!

Kicking off his heavy shoes, he dove straight in the water, striking it without hardly a ripple. He struck out with an overhand stroke and gained splendidly at the offset when suddenly he felt something pulling at his legs and had all he could do to keep himself up. Each time he attempted to go ahead, just that much he was pulled back again.

Westy was an excellent swimmer and had many experiences with the undertow in the waters of the Atlantic. He knew just how to buck the tide and when not to. But this was different; a new state of affairs entirely, and not much headway could be gained.

Every few feet he would be almost sucked under by this impetuous thing that lay hidden beneath the

calm and gleaming surface. It was almost incredible that Nature could be so subtle as to entice the poor, weak human being into such a trap by virtue of its warm, soothing waters.

However, for another short distance it seemed he was granted a respite and had shaken himself free of it, and in his joy he raised his head and called to Rip a few words of comfort.

All he could see of the trapped boy was his head and shoulders and his arms clasping the tree in a tight grasp. Rip didn't answer him.

"Do you hear, old boy?" Westy called again. "I'm on the way at last!"

Westy kept on and realized that Rip's exhaustion was pretty complete when it prevented him answering. And then again he felt the tugging at his legs. This time it was worse, much worse than before, and he realized that it was going to take all his strength to make it.

His arms were beginning to ache as the result of his body dragging its weight upon them. But with determined effort he at last got within twenty feet or so of Rip and the tree.

In the glimpses he got of the boy's face as it partially submerged and then reappeared with the ter-

rific undercurrent, he saw that it was of a death-like pallor.

"Rip, it's not much longer. Try and hold on a minute!"

Rip turned his head slowly, never loosening his grasp on the tree, and a look of pathetic hopelessness was in his tired eyes.

"You can't make it, Wes!" he called, his voice just above a whisper. "It's a regular whirlpool here within ten feet of me. I'm so tired, but it's my own fault!"

"Only a second now, kid!" Westy's voice was so cheerful, but he was thinking: "Huh! About ten feet, is it?" He didn't see how he was going to make it, either. His arms were so cramped, and if it was a whirlpool there . . . He stopped about twelve feet from Rip and rested a precious second, swinging one arm and then the other to revive his circulation.

Gauging the distance in his mind's eye, he took a plunge and was whirled like a top through the water, coming up directly alongside of the tree twelve feet or so nearer to the cliff than Rip was and out of the worst of the vortex.

Swinging his body with all his strength, he man-

aged to get one leg over the tree trunk and pulled the rest over gradually. Dragging himself forward, he reached the end, where the exhausted boy encircled the tree with his arms.

As he leaned forward to grasp them, Rip let one slip off and Westy saw to his dismay that his eyes were blinking suspiciously and grabbed the remaining hand quickly as Rip's head fell slowly forward on his chest.

Westy tried to pull, taking a firmer hold on the fainting boy's arm by twisting his own legs about the trunk to fortify himself. It was a terrible struggle, holding that inert body by one hand.

He pulled again, and as he did so he felt his own person jerked roughly and his eyes dilated with horror as he saw what had happened.

Rip's head had gone under!

CHAPTER XXIV

A THOUGHT FOR TO-MORROW

WESTY never knew what great strength he had been given in that crucial moment. He only remembered afterward that every muscle in his body was strained to the utmost in being equal to that almost superhuman task.

It was enough to know that he finally pulled Rip out of the torrential current—unconscious; almost gone, but still a little life-giving breath left in the cold body.

A difficult thing to pull himself and his heavy burden over that slippery trunk. He thought he would never get to the cliff, so slow was his progress. But he made it and laid the still form face downward on the broad base.

Working tirelessly over the limp form to restore respiration, Westy noted some dark clouds gathering in the sky and partly obscuring the sun from view. He worked diligently, waiting to see the poor purpled lips utter a human sound.

After a short time elapsed and still he did not seem to respond, Westy became thoroughly alarmed, for a storm was coming on and it was getting darker overhead every minute.

He worked over him harder than ever, pleading, praying and asking for Divine intercession before the storm would break. Watching so intently, he really imagined that Rip was moving his body and his lips were moving in speech. But when he'd hold his face close to the unconscious boy he knew it was just hysteria that made him think he was moving and speaking when he wasn't. So taking hold of himself, he started in again and had just grasped Rip's arms to move him when the boy opened his eyes.

Westy's thankfulness knew no bounds.

"Say, Wes," he said a trifle weakly, "there's no dirt in your eyes at all. I'll take it all back right now!"

"Forget it, Rip!" Westy was wiping away the tears, unashamed, that were clouding his eyes. "I'm only glad that you're K. O. How d'ye feel?"

"O. K. Not so bad, huh?"

"I should say not. Do you think you'd be able to get up with some help in a few minutes?"

"Sure, I'm no cripple. Any hurry?"

"No, only I want to get you up in the shelter of the cliff before the storm breaks."

"Storm? Gee, that's so! We're on the base now, aren't we? How'd you ever do it, Wes? I thought I was a goner sure. Would have been if I hadn't lost my way getting up here. Went in the other direction, but got here eventually. Lucky I lost that much time. The water was like a merry-go-round where I was stuck. Couldn't get my legs out at all. Don't know how long I held on, but it seemed like hours."

"Well, we won't talk of it any more. You're tip-top now and that's that! Think you can make it now if I give you a lift?"

The storm was gathering in earnest and as the thunder rumbled in the distance and lightning flashed in frenzied streaks across the black horizon, the boys ascended the cliff slowly but surely.

Beginning a short distance back, the stunted cliff was topped by a thick jungle of trees and rank undergrowth, but at that Westy was thankful for the protection it afforded in the fury of the storm that followed.

They walked in the forest quite a ways with the

wind and rain beating all around them and came to a spot where some trees had fallen in some storm of long ago and which time had cemented together, forming a perfect shelter beneath their giant trunks.

Westy and Rip crawled under and in.

It was dry and warm, but didn't allow them any more room than they needed to lie down in.

Rip took his wet bathing suit off and spread it out to dry and Westy also removed his wet garments and then they both crawled under the dry dead leaves to keep warm.

"I'm pretty hungry, Wes, aren't you?"

"Don't speak of it now! It's a very delicate subject. Neither of us have had anything since breakfast. My gosh!"

"I'm so tired and sleepy, though," Rip said. "I guess I can close my eyes and forget it. We'll think of it to-morrow, eh?"

"Sure, 's time enough!"

But Westy wondered and was worried. He knew that any attempt to swim back across the lake would be foolhardy. The whole place was probably a series of the whirlpools. And it was senseless to take the chance. The forest was their only means of escape. They'd have to trust to luck to get out of it and

around over the mountain. That was the question now uppermost in his mind. How and where?

As if reading his thoughts, Rip faced him, half-asleep, and smiled:

"I guess the question for to-morrow is: Where do we go from here?"

CHAPTER XXV

LOST

THE desire to sleep soon overcame the desire to think and wonder more, and it made Westy powerless to do anything but just shut his eyes. It lulled his tired nerves like a powerful opiate after the day's events and soon he and Rip were breathing quietly and restfully through the long night.

A faint chink of light shining through the aperture told Westy that it was daylight. But he was disheartened when he heard the steady patter of rain upon the dead leaves outside. Rip was still sleeping peacefully as yet and Westy hadn't the heart to disturb him.

There was an awful gnawing sensation in his stomach and he felt mighty uncomfortable and stretched out a bit. With that Rip stirred and sat up quickly.

"Jiminy, I didn't know where I was for the moment! Some little hiding place, eh? I wonder what Unk thinks, though?"

"I've been thinking of that, too." Westy was thinking of a little tell-tale pile of clothes that would be discovered along with his own discarded shoes.

"After I locate something to chew on why we'll go and keep watch for them from the cliff, so they'll at least know we are still alive."

"That's right, I didn't think of it. Unk will be relieved—but peeved at me!"

They were putting on their dried things—that is, Westy was, but Rip had only his bathing suit. Then they crawled out, viewing the desolate scene around them, for it was raining harder than they thought.

"We'll have to look up some eats somewhere, Rip. Feel all right to mosey around with me?"

"Sure."

"All right then. You better take my socks. I've more on than you."

"Naw, I don't feel cold yet. We're a hot-looking team, though, to be walking around in the jungle and half undressed at that in all this rain. Let's go!"

The quest in search of food was exceedingly arduous as they walked further and further into the thick forest. In the end, as the fruits of their labors in beating down underbrush and tall weeds, all they found was some wild berries here and there. It

sufficed a little, but they hadn't so far found a stream anywhere in which to quench their thirst.

"We'll have to make the best of it for now, Rip. There's no telling what time it is a day like this without the sun, so we better make the same tracks for the cliff and signal your Uncle and Billy some way. Lola's sure to come, too."

They started back. Rip's bare feet were getting uncomfortably sore from the stone bruises and cuts he was continually receiving and Westy's socks were horribly soggy and cold. He took them off and threw them away.

It seemed that they had been walking a long time and Westy looked frankly puzzled.

"Do I imagine it, or are the trees thicker than when we came this way hunting for the berries? It looks different to me somehow, don't you think so?"

"Sure it does, Wes. This isn't the way we came at all—I can't see our tracks now at all!"

"You're right! Let's go back a bit."

They went back, but looking for their footprints became a decided search.

"We might as well go right on until we find them," Westy said, as puzzled as ever.

"Yeh, let's keep strict watch this time!"

On they went, eyes fixed on the ground and at the same time victims to the overhanging branches and thick thorny brush. Their faces and arms were scratched almost beyond recognition.

Hour after hour passed.

They were getting hungry again; in fact, they had been that way for a long while and their thirst was acute. No water had they spied yet, and after devouring some more berries in resignation, they rested a little and then went on.

Hardly a word had been spoken between them, for they were keenly aware of their serious situation and the rain was falling as bad as ever with night coming on apace.

Westy thought that the cliff must have fallen prey to some supernatural power and had been swallowed up in the forest's depths also.

Hungry, tired and thirsty, they watched the gray shadows of twilight steal through the closely grown trees, and where even in broad daylight it was a place of gloom.

Now it seemed more depressing than ever and the echoes of their voices came back to them like mocking ghosts of days long past.

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It was awfully eerie, and as they sat down on a boulder to rest, huddled close together to keep warm, the tall trees stood out like gaunt shadows in a sepulchral world.

"Do you realize, Rip? Here we are—two scouts——"

"Yep!"

"And we're lost!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THEY MEET A LOWLY STRANGER

ALL through that long night Westy and Rip took turns trying to get some sleep on the hard boulder. Tired and sleepy though they were, they couldn't rest any more than a few moments at a time and were more than glad to give up their uncomfortable berth to one another.

It was Westy's turn to sit up and he thought it must be way past midnight. How they would welcome the coming dawn! He was so cold and as he sat there shivering in the pouring rain, he wondered if they would ever find their way out. He shivered more when he thought of Lola's verdict about those who had been trapped there before.

Surely, there must be some mysterious force at work there! What else was it that made them lose their tracks so easily? He wondered if Rip had overcome his skepticism and accepted Lola's story as true. No matter what name people gave it, Westy was convinced that something supernatural had invaded that dark dank place and reigned supreme.

There wasn't a sound but the falling rain and it seemed to be growing more silent all the time. He thought that every breathing thing but they in that vast jungle must be dry and sheltered.

He was trying to shield Rip's face with his hands and had covered his legs with his blouse. His head continually sagged forward, while his whole body felt cramped from the unnatural position he was in, but he thought as he exercised a little to relieve the tension, they had to stick close together in a case like that, no matter how it hurt.

It never occurred to Westy to feel any resentment toward the younger boy and that Rip's perversity was responsible for their precarious situation. He just simply took things as they came along and whether purposely or not, forgot the root of the evil entirely.

Westy was that kind of a scout.

Finally he came out of his chilly reverie with a start. Rip was actually sleeping. He grinned as he thought of the saying of being tired enough to sleep on a rock. Rip certainly must have an iron-bound back to sleep all that time. Well, let him; it would do him good!

The continual downpour made Westy wonder again what they were going to do about drinking wa-

ter. He was beginning to feel a little feverish already. They'd have to drink the rain water if they could find something to catch it in—but there wasn't much likelihood of finding anything.

Their last resort would be the stagnant pools that were gradually deepening and widening all over from the incessant rain. Perhaps the dawn would bring the sunshine, he thought hopefully.

Rip moved suddenly and cried, as in fright.

"What's the matter, kid?" Westy thought he was dreaming.

"There's something heavy on my hand—I can't move it."

He reached out and felt around in the darkness to where Rip's hand had dangled on the ground in his sleep.

Even in the dark as his own hand came in contact with the cold, slimy object Westy knew instinctively what it was.

Huge and heavy, it had rested its whole weight on the sleeping boy's hand, and quickly seizing it in both of his own, Westy flung it as far as his strength permitted.

"What was it, Wes?" Rip was relieved as he heard the thud of the falling thing.

"Nothing—just a nice big snake!"

CHAPTER XXVII

A LITTLE HOPE

"I DON'T think I care about lying down again," Rip sighed. "The next one that happened to come along would be liable to park on my chest."

"You're darn lucky it wasn't a rattler or you wouldn't be here to give a hang where the next one parked!"

"What kind of a snake was it?"

"How in the name of Johanna do I know! Do you think I've got eyes like a cat or do you think I stopped to affectionately examine it?"

"Tut! I feel as though I'm wet clear to my heart and I'm getting thirstier by the minute."

"Don't mention it, Rip. I only hope it gets light soon so we can get the lay of the land again and feed on some more berries. They're individualists when it comes to the food line here—no competition.

"The bushes ought to be good and wet from all this rain and that'll be a little moisture, anyway. Gee, I'll never use the word berries in slang any

more, Wes. They've certainly been a life-saver, but we'll be getting fed up on them after another day. Suppose we haven't found our way out by to-morrow night?"

"Well, we haven't then. What's the use of worrying about it until then?"

"I suppose that's the best way to look at it. You've ten times more nerve than I'll ever have!"

Westy liked that frankness in Rip. Despite his sullen stubbornness at times, he'd at least admit when he was beaten.

Morning came again—raining, and they started to walk on, Westy, the keen edge of his hopes dulled a little, but still outwardly cheerful and Rip silent in his disappointment.

After devouring more berries they went on, trying not to think of the imperious demand of their thirst, and as the morning wore on they became tired and stopped to rest again.

"Doesn't seem to be many berries around here, Rip! I'm getting hungry again. Shall we go ahead?"

"I don't care. Whatever you say; but for my part, I'm kind of sick of them. I've got to have water, Wes, that's all there is to it!"

"I know, Rip, but that is stagnant water—it's dangerous and vile!"

But Rip had come to the point where Nature was forcing him and made him fearless of the danger of anything, for before Westy had finished warning him he was down on his knees, taking draught after draught of the green-looking water in his small cupped hands.

Westy shuddered as he watched the stuff drip through Rip's fingers and hoped he would be given the strength to refrain from drinking it for a while at least.

They trudged on again, hardly caring now where they went, and Rip stopping at intervals to consume more and more of the putrid water in spite of Westy cautioning him to stop.

Shivering though they both were, in their wet garments, Westy noticed a decided hectic flush upon Rip's face and it worried him.

It was getting dark again, and still no lull in the storm, but Westy's weary-looking eyes brightened as he caught sight of something ahead.

"Look, Rip, old top! On the ground!"

"What is it?"

"Our tracks—from yesterday!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

WATER

HOPE sprung anew! Their hearts fairly sang.

"Guess we better stay right here for the night, Rip. We're likely to lose them again if we try to follow them in this dingy light."

"Whatever you say. I could stretch out on the soaking ground, I'm so tired!"

"Same here, but on the other hand that wouldn't pay. We've been soaked long enough as it is."

Looking around, Westy spied a huge tree, with big broad limbs, wide enough for them to recline on. The tree next to it was growing so close that its branches also added further protection from the rain and provided more space for their bodies.

They clambered up and by Westy doubling his knees under him it enabled Rip to lay his head back, but kept his knees upright. The branches of the other tree supported Westy's back nicely.

All he was able to do was catnap in his stiff, rigid position, for he felt duty bound to keep a watchful

eye on Rip, who was likely to fall out should he try to turn suddenly. It was terribly uncomfortable, but better than the wet ground, and their close quarters afforded more warmth.

Hour after hour seemed to have passed and no murmur or word had emanated from Rip's lips. Just the steady laborious breathing—unusually heavy, Westy thought, but probably from the discomfort. Still, he slept!

After quite a lapse of time Rip moved slightly and Westy immediately leaned forward.

"Westy?" Rip's voice had a strange sound.

"Yes? What is it?"

"I've just got to have some more of that water!"

"Rip, old kid, I'd gladly go and get it, but there isn't a thing to carry it in and I dare say I'd never find even a pool in this darkness."

"Never thought of that, Wes! 'S all right——" His voice trailed away drowsily and the next moment his steady breathing was resumed.

"Just dreaming, I guess," Westy said.

And so he sat on until he thought that night was a thing made up of terrifying silence; an abyss of blackness wherein the hours hid and disported playfully about, instead of going quickly by as all good

daytime hours did. The hours of that night simply plunged Westy into the very depths of despair.

"Ah, but the tracks!" He had forgotten them for the moment. Dawn would bring them something at that, so he must not give up.

Rip was mumbling again, talking jumbled in his sleep and let his legs fall over the limb.

"Wes, you there?"

"Of course. What now?"

"S'more of that water 's all I want!"

"You that thirsty, Rip?"

"Yeh, can't help it. S'more of that water 's all——"

"Gosh, I can't get it now. Can't you wait a little longer until it brightens a little? I don't want to lose my way in the darkness and leave you here alone. We'd both be alone in this infernal place then!"

"'S all right. Can't be 'lone, huh? Must have water, though, 's all. *Water!*"

His voice was not the voice of Rip, Westy thought. It sounded like some strange being whom he did not know. He mumbled again.

"Been dreamin', Wes—that Unk was hitting me on the head with a hammer for going in the lake. Hit me so hard—still hurts. My head! Let me lay

my head in your lap, Wes, won't you? No sissy—only tree's so hard and it hurts."

"Sure thing!" Westy pulled him gently by the arms, meanwhile thinking deep thoughts. Rip's head sank in his lap and it gave Westy a chance to stretch his legs a bit over on the next limb.

"'S soft snap," Rip continued in the strange voice. "Tell Unk to bring 's more that water—nice green water!"

Westy's hand touched his forehead and face lightly and then felt his burning body. There was no doubt of it, he realized.

Rip was delirious.

CHAPTER XXIX

DESPAIR

THREE nights and two days! What was this dawn bringing to them? Rain, hunger and thirst again? Westy wondered.

Where there had been nothing but blackness above and beneath them there were now little faint touches of light in the dark void above the trees.

It grew lighter with Rip's every second breath. He was turning and twisting his head in Westy's lap and mumbling incoherently.

Poor Westy was aching in every muscle, feverish from thirst and sickeningly hungry. Also greater than his wants was the despair he felt over Rip's alarming condition.

He listened as he thought he heard a lull in the falling of the rain. Then it gradually lessened and stopped as the dawn broke clear and promising overhead.

The next thing to do was awaken Rip and Westy hated doing it in his condition. He talked to him and the sick boy opened his eyes and stared.

"We have to get down, Rip, do you understand?" Rip nodded and sat up and Westy slid to the ground and helped him down.

He obeyed just like a child, but said nothing and immediately laid down on the earth again and closed his eyes. He was asleep within a very few minutes.

Westy turned and watched the sun peeping through the curtain of dawn, so warm and friendly. It made him feel warm and partially dry for the first time in three days, but his spirits sank as he saw that the tracks were leading further into the forest and not where they had hoped. And his hunger and thirst were distracting him.

He noted that Rip's breathing was easier and his temperature seemed to have dropped. But fever acted that way, Westy thought, and got bad at night. Still, if it wasn't so bad during the day he could go on a little with help. He'd see how he felt, but meanwhile he must get something to eat first.

There wasn't a berry bush in sight and as he looked at the stagnant pool a little distance from him he shook his head and reached up in one of the limbs of the tree.

Pulling the leaves off one after the other, he

sucked the moisture out of them greedily, but with delight. It took the worst of the parched feeling away and then he gave some to Rip, who chewed leaf and all.

Looking at his eyes, Westy saw that Rip was so bad as to be incognizant of his surroundings and stared blankly ahead.

It was deplorable, but they would have to go on whether the boy was in his right mind or not, but Westy was sure of one thing and that was that he wouldn't leave Rip alone for any length of time. Better not to leave him at all—still he had to have something to eat. . . .

Just then he saw a large bird!

CHAPTER XXX

A SCOUT WITH WINGS

IT was perched low on a near-by tree and its plumage was of the most gorgeous coloring that Westy had ever seen. Its body was plump and quite long, and its tail was dotted like some exquisite jeweled fan.

He sat down on a boulder and watched it as it warbled a deep-throated trill. Ostensibly, it was doing this for Westy's sole benefit, for when it got through it would look to him as though awaiting applause and start off again, sweeter than before.

Westy wondered if it would be wrong to kill this beautiful thing and satisfy his own terrible hunger or take the chance of finding something and go on?

The bird fascinated him! The sweet notes pouring out of its tiny throat, the eyes seeming to look his way, as if to say it was lonely also and enjoyed the chance meeting. And the lovely plumage! It was made for a paradise and sunshine, not the dank, dark forest.

Its tameness and beauty tempted Westy to whistle low and sweet as he had heard Lola do that day so long ago when they first saw the lake. She had said that a bird would eventually come to you if you would sit quietly and whistle long enough.

At first the bird just looked and listened, never moving. But as Westy kept on, it flew to the ground about five feet away, then came nearer and nearer until it hopped on his bare foot.

Westy reached down carefully and stroked its glossy, well-shaped head. Very gently he put his hand over it and raised it up to his lap. To his surprise, the bird nestled against him comfortably and relaxed.

"I couldn't cook it," Westy thought as he watched it, "but I'm desperate for something and it would be some sort of food at that. But how——"

Instinctively his hand clasped the bird tighter. He couldn't bear to look at this beautiful creature he intended to destroy. But something made him look again and he succumbed to the desire to glance at it once more before its life would be extinct.

As he glanced down the bird looked up at him, implicit trust in its expression. Westy tried to drown the tenderness welling up within him and

forced a stern look upon his countenance, and as he faced it for the last time the bird chirped and hopped upon his arm and he grasped it quickly with his free hand.

But the mute appeal in those eyes was too much for Westy. He turned his head away and then back again, smiling:

"All right, old man," he said. "You want to live just the same as I do, isn't that so?"

It almost seemed to understand.

"Well," Westy continued aloud, "you're going to go right on living *now*, as far as I'm concerned. If I can't find anything else to eat to-day I'll start digging for worms the same as you do."

With that he released the bird and it flew over his head. He couldn't see where it went, but he heard it warbling again—the sweet, deep-throated trill.

It kept up so insistently that Westy pushed through the damp brush a little way to see where it had gone. As he parted the tall weeds he beheld the little golden throat perched on the limb of a walnut tree, abounding with its ripened fruit.

He rushed forward with eagerness and as he climbed up on the lower limb the bird looked at him

almost significantly and took to one of the top branches.

Westy jammed and crammed his pockets full; meaning to crack them on the boulder. After he had filled every available space in his trousers, he clambered down. Then he looked up at his benefactor and smiled.

"Thanks, old man, for the find! You're a better scout than I am any day!"

In answer the bird trilled again and then flew—up, up into the sunshine and away.

Westy watched him enviously.

"Still," he mused, "I guess after all it's a case of Even Stephen. God gave me hands and feet and you—your wings!"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE TRAIL ONCE AGAIN

WESTY made up his mind he'd get out of that forest before another night imprisoned them. With the help of the sun they could go directly east, then northeast. They'd be bound to strike the trail some time.

But there was Rip! Getting worse and worse all the time. How he would manage it he didn't know; hadn't any idea, except that his mind had been made up to find a way!

It was discouraging and unbearably tedious trying to help the sick boy walk through the thorny underbrush, unhindered in its growth throughout the summers of many long centuries. Not only that, but he had to keep constantly on the alert for snakes, for they had had many narrow escapes from them so far.

Much time was lost in stopping to rest, but it had to be done in order to go on again. He didn't dare overtax Rip any more than could be avoided

and his own strength was being tried to the very limits of endurance.

There were odd moments when Rip was partly rational and at such times Westy would reason it out with him that he was trying to get him back to his Uncle and for him to do his part and keep up until they got there. In his half-dazed condition he seemed to understand, and when they started on again it was incredible to Westy almost to see his indomitable will overrule his physical weakness.

The sun was at their back now and still no sign of a trail—nothing. Nothing but trees! Westy began to hate the sight of them.

They were both pretty near exhaustion again and, while Rip rested on a pile of dead leaves, Westy went ahead a little to beat down the brush that grew thicker in that region than anywhere they had struck so far.

In appearance both of the boys had changed pitifully. The sunken eyes and wan look about the face, so white and drawn, and the parched lips. Even about the body the flesh had fallen away terribly. But Westy looked the worst and he doubted whether his own mother would have recognized him then.

It seemed to him that there wasn't a whole piece

of flesh on his arms and hands. His face and legs and feet were also swollen from the poisonous weeds he had trampled down. His feet weren't so painful as on the first day or two; they had now become calloused, but that didn't alleviate the pain of the infected cuts and scratches.

Rip, though not so horribly scratched and cut, looked pitiful enough with his fever-ridden eyes and face. His continual calls for water gave Westy little peace of mind. He had given him the rain-soaked leaves that he found, but now they were scarce as the sun had dried all the available ones. And he was determined not to give the sick boy another drop of that death-infested water.

His own thirst and hunger was like some terrible disease gnawing first at his body and then at his brain. He couldn't even think clear thoughts. The dread of losing his mind—but then he knew he must keep up for Rip's sake and he would. So he was satisfied to devour some dry leaves and swallowed them whole.

Ah, he saw something! A tree just ahead of him he noticed shaded nicely by the rest was still dripping from the rains. It made him think of Rip's thirst and it looked easy to climb.

He ran back to where Rip was sleeping peacefully and carefully removed the tattered blouse he had put on him. Then running back to the tree again he got up on the first few limbs when he noticed some peculiar-looking berries hanging from the upper branches. So he filled the blouse with as many wet leaves as it would hold and decided to go higher and sample some of the fruit.

Reaching the top limb, he leaned over to grasp some, but his hand was retarded in the movement by the sight that met and dazzled his hollowed eyes.

Within a stone's throw of him was the trail!

CHAPTER XXXII

DREAMING

HAD Westy been a medieval knight in quest of the Holy Grail and had at last beheld the object of his search before his very eyes, he couldn't have been happier.

Tears of unrestrained emotion stained his gaunt face as he looked down upon this veritable land of promise. Away to the northwest his eyes followed its winding course and his heart leaped to see a tiny spiral of smoke curling its way upward with such a restful, comfortable look.

It was entirely unconscious—that simile. But he felt ever after that it suited the purpose. Curling smoke meant warmth and food, comfort and rest. And how Rip needed them now! Typical of Westy that he should forget his own needs at such a time.

He helped himself to the berries and put some in the blouse, hoping it would tide them over until—— He was afraid to let the thought form itself completely for fear that perhaps after all it was nothing

more than a visionary trend his starvation was taking. But then he was sure he was feeling better after consuming the berries and his head didn't swim quite as badly as before. No, it was *real* and so near!

He hurried back to Rip.

As he looked at the sleeping boy he wished he could only make him comprehend that his sufferings would soon be ministered to and that his tortured body would rest in a nice soft bunk.

The fever was beginning to mount again with the advent of sunset and he was babbling meaningless phrases. Westy took the wet leaves and moistened his parched lips. He opened his eyes, but there wasn't a sign of recognition in them.

Westy didn't know whether it was harmful or not in his condition, but he fed Rip some of the berries. After a few mouthfuls, however, he refused any more.

Just as the sun was setting they came out on the trail. Near them was a large rock high and dry, and he decided it would be just the place for them that night. It was large enough to allow them to lay full length and side by side for the first time in three nights. He could make it a little softer with some

dry leaves, even if he had to make many trips back and forth in getting them. Westy's thoughts were getting breathless, too.

He figured that he and Rip could make it the next day and reach the shack by mid-afternoon even considering the stop-overs with Rip, so he set to work fixing their rocky berth. The leaves were nice and warm and dry, and Rip sank back in them with a sigh.

That at least was a hopeful sign Westy thought as he watched him and wondered if he'd hold out the rest of the way. He didn't even ask for water now—nothing but sleep. Was it a good or bad sign? He didn't know, but Mrs. Redmond would probably know what to do for him to-morrow. He repeated the word to-morrow again and he thought it fairly lilted as he uttered it and laid down contentedly in the warm leaves.

His anxiety about Rip kept him awake and he watched the stars overhead. Cool though it was, he was thankful for the clear windless night of the open in preference to the damp dark forest. Then he piled more leaves on Rip, fearful of him taking more cold along with the fever and left himself uncovered.

He wished, oh, how he wished as he lay there, to

have just one drink of water before his eyes closed in sleep. That thought had a distressing effect upon him ever since his thirst began. His throat immediately began to ache and he had all sorts of unpleasant sensations until he overcame them by force of will.

Sleep came to him mercifully, though, and he dreamed that he was drinking large buckets of water out of an old well. Presently Lola and her grandmother came along and Mrs. Redmond called excitedly for him to stop drinking it, that the well was poisoned. Lola screamed a loud piercing shriek and it was so shrill that it awakened him.

He raised his head to look, so realistic was the scream.

There on the edge of the rock were two green eyes, gleaming like darts of flame in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXIII

JUST A FEW HOURS TO GO

It was too dark to distinguish who the owner of the eyes happened to be. All Westy could see was the outline of a head, shoulders and paws resting on the rock's edge.

He realized after the first shock passed that whatever kind of an animal it was, it wouldn't do for him to betray fear.

He stayed perfectly rigid in the same position as when he had raised slightly on his elbow and first saw the eyes. The animal sniffed the air but never moved—keeping an attitude of being ready to spring in a second.

Westy could see by the head and shoulders that the animal was a good size; possibly a puma whose lair was in the haunted forest. What luck they escaped him there.

While these thoughts flashed through his mind he returned the stare, never letting his eyes stray an inch from that pair of veritable live coals. He con-

centrated every nerve and muscle, his own large dark eyes accentuated by their hollowness set in the thin white haggard face.

His arm was asleep and his body shook from the pressure on the nerve in his elbow, but still he stuck bravely. He was thankful that Rip was sleeping so quietly—his breathing could hardly be detected and Westy prayed that he wouldn't move.

Finally the animal sniffed the air again and moved its head. It withdrew one paw—then the other and the head disappeared under the rock.

It wasn't until Westy heard the heavy body on its thick padded feet plodding toward the forest that he finally relaxed—exhausted. He didn't have the strength to look and make sure. The events of the last few days had used up too much vitality—he wanted sleep and didn't care where the animal went.

When he awakened the sun was shining in his face and Rip's old familiar cry was ringing in his ears.

"Water! Just—drop—water!"

It fairly made his heart ache to hear him and he sprang up. Rip was still warmly covered by the leaves, but his eyes looked without seeing anything.

"We'll get water now, very soon! Do you hear? We have to go on a bit first."

He steadied Rip as they got down off the rock, but he staggered and stumbled along in spite of Westy's help.

But they went on fairly well until noontime, when Rip's fever got worse. Even with Westy's arm around him he seemed not to be able to manipulate his legs any more.

They would go a few steps and his knees would bend under and his head sink forward on his chest. Westy felt it was really cruel to make him go on in that condition—but they were so near and neither of them could stand another night without water. The heat also was getting unbearable as the day wore on.

Westy's hunger by now was so terrible that his body seemed to have become numb from the continual suppression. His arm instinctively tightened about Rip as he thought of it, but the younger boy roughly pushed him aside and with an almost maniacal expression on his face, leaped ahead for twenty feet or more and then fell face downward.

Westy ran forward. Kneeling beside him, he raised his head up to his lap.

Rip was unconscious.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHEN IGNORANCE WAS BLISS

THE evening of the day that Rip had gone to the lake with Westy following in his wake, Mr. Wilde and Billy returned to the cabin, thoroughly tired and their clothes dripping wet.

"Guess the kids won't be coming along to-night," Mr. Wilde remarked to Billy, who was kindling some logs in the fireplace.

"I should say not! Mrs. Redmond wouldn't let them, I guess. Hospitality is served with a capital H there."

After supper with the wind howling all about and the rain pouring off the roof, they sat down to read. Ten o'clock found Billy yawning.

"That means we'll hope for a better day to-morrow," said Mr. Wilde.

But when morning brought nothing more than the doleful swish of wind and storm above their heads, they turned over with a sigh and slept until almost noon.

"Well, no sign of those little tramps yet," Mr. Wilde said, a cup of hot coffee balanced in one hand and a two-weeks'-old copy of the Saturday Evening Post in the other.

"Thought you read that all." Billy pointed to the Post.

"I did. And I know all the 'ads' by heart, too!"

"What's the idea then?"

"Only that I can never read at breakfast time home. When I'm away like this I take a malicious delight in reading while I'm eating just because my wife tells me it's bad for the digestion and also a serious breach of etiquette. Even though I've read these things over fifty times I enjoy them as much as though I'd never laid eyes on them before. Only at breakfast, though."

"Why specify breakfast?"

"Because that's when my wife don't approve of me doing it."

"Why, you're no more grown up than Westy or Rip at that rate!"

"I know it! Show me any man who is—in his heart!"

With the night coming on and the rain still swirl-

ing about the cabin, Mr. Wilde began to get a little anxious about the boys.

"Even as bad as it's been to-day, I shouldn't think those kids would impose on the Redmonds' good nature any longer. My heavens, a little soaking won't hurt them. They're supposed to be scouts, not nin-nies."

"Oh, I don't think that's the reason at all. I've an idea it's just been a treat for those people to have them as guests for these two desolate nights and days. They've probably urged them, knowing we wouldn't be anxious."

"Perhaps you're right, Billy. They are old enough to take care of themselves and know what's the right thing to do. I guess we will see them in the morning all right."

It was almost noontime of the next day before Mr. Wilde and Billy were all prepared to leave for the eastern end of the range.

Billy was inside getting the rest of his stuff together, while the older man stood outside, waiting. He caught sight of Lola coming up the path from the brook. She smiled sweetly as she came toward him.

"Do you feel like a bird to-day after all the rain?" she asked him.

"Indeed I do."

"It isn't possible that the boys aren't up yet?"

"What? What did you say—not up?" He couldn't seem to quite comprehend.

Billy came out after hearing her question and interrupted.

"Haven't they been at your place these two nights past?"

"Why, no!" Her face went dead white as she remembered.

She told them the incident of the haunted region and about Westy's departure for the lake after Rip.

"I never dreamed but what they came back safely, Mr. Wilde, or I'd have come here and told you." Her voice was quivering and a tear slid down her frightened face.

Mr. Wilde patted her shoulder comfortingly.

"There now, it isn't your fault. They aren't babies—but yet—they've been gone since the day before yesterday. . . ."

CHAPTER XXXV

WESTY RUNS TRUE TO FORM

"My theory is," broke in Billy, "that you're all crossing your bridges too soon. We don't know until we find out. Come on!"

Lola ran ahead to tell her grandmother and promised to join them along the trail.

There was little talk between them. Even the optimistic Billy was silent and when Lola caught up with them her face was so grave that it tended to make them more alarmed than ever.

"It seems longer than when we came here the other day," Mr. Wilde said to relieve the tension.

"Yes," said Lola, "and I didn't think then I'd be the cause——"

"Now, my dear child!" Mr. Wilde was touched by her self-indictment. "No one is to blame but Rip and at that I couldn't call him down for having been born with a stubborn disposition, could I?"

"Of course not," Lola agreed.

"But Westy," Mr. Wilde continued, "that boy is

a jewel. He has more sense than Rip'll ever have. Likes adventure, but uses discretion."

"What's the use of talking about it?" Billy interposed. "We are as we are!"

"No doubt. I hate to think of the two mothers and fathers who are going to accuse me of wanton laxity in my care of their sons if we don't find them. I shouldn't have taken the responsibility at all. It's my fault!"

"Say, for the love of goodness," Billy pleaded, "you're like the fellow who ordered his mother-in-law's flowers two weeks before she died!"

"Well, he had a reason," Mr. Wilde said, his humorous squint coming to the fore.

"Well, so have you," Billy answered, "a reason to cheer up. I've more faith in Westy's gameness than Rip's bragging. If we don't see any signs of them up there we still shouldn't feel discouraged."

"Why?" questioned Lola.

"But," Mr. Wilde said, "Lola says herself that if they were lucky enough to get out of the lake and land on the cliff they'd have less chance than ever trying to get out of the forest. No one ever has yet, so what chance have two kids? Why, she says there's absolutely no way of getting any nourishment or

water and the place is filled with snakes. Nothing but a dense jungle of trees and stagnant pools. Plenty of malaria I bet. Three days they've been gone—think of it!"

"Now come on," Billy said. "I feel as anxious as you, but I'm not going to give up so easy. Here we are now!"

Turning away from the broad terrace, they could see at first glance what they knew they would see—nothing. Not a sign nor sound of human life but their own, and as they stood looking out over the placid-looking water three minds were all of one thought.

It was so terribly silent that the humming sounded louder than ever. It would almost seem that the heinous spirit of the lake was mocking these humans in their fears and anxiety and challenging their puny bodies to combat this terrific force that Nature gave it as its birthright.

Lola wasn't the crying kind of a girl. She felt so keenly that it wouldn't have happened but for her recital of the legend that she was angry with herself and from anger she felt fear and pity for the boys. Then she cried and turned toward the trees that Mr. Wilde and Billy might not see her emotion.

As her eyes were gradually clearing again she saw through the blur—two pair of scout shoes on the ground, right at her feet.

"Look!" she exclaimed, and as the two men turned she picked them up.

It was the last straw as far as Mr. Wilde was concerned; he couldn't even bear to look and turned away, walking toward the terracé. Billy and Lola followed him heavy-hearted and almost without hope.

"We'll go right away," Billy said, "and get around into the forest."

"I'm going with you then," Lola said determinedly, "but I'll run home first and get food and water. They'll need it and so will we! Wait for me there!"

She was gone and had disappeared on the narrow path winding above the ravine. After just about time enough to have reached the trail, they heard her scream.

"Mr. Wilde! Billy! Quick—oh, quick!"

They came running out of the narrow path and reached her side almost breathless. She was waving her hands with great excitement and her face was a picture of convulsive terror and pity.

Along the upper part of the trail they saw!

It was Westy, his clothes now just a few rags covering his raw swollen flesh and his face puffed and deathly white. With great effort he was carrying Rip, whose inert body hung over his shoulder.

As he stumbled toward them, his feet pitifully cut and bleeding, they could hear him babbling unintelligible words to the unconscious boy.

Hurrying to relieve him of his burden, he pushed them aside—holding fast to Rip as a mother would her child in great danger. His brain, sick as it was, could not crush the spirit that was Westy Martin nor deter him from keeping trust.

His ague-stricken form straightened up as if to defy them to bar his way. A look of inanity filled his usual bright expressive eyes and when he spoke his voice had been reduced to almost a whisper from his weakened state.

“Must—get—him—back! Not ’nother night without water!”

CHAPTER XXXVI

BILLY DOES SOME REMINDING

As a result of Lola's insistence, the two emaciated boys lay that night in the cottage, still very sick, but in competent hands.

The Redmonds had to learn everything in life by experience and their knowledge of all human ills was derived from that same source.

All through that night Mr. Wilde, Billy and the two emergency nurses waited anxiously for the delirious chatter to stop—to hear the gratifying sound of slow yet steady breathing that means normal sleep. And their waiting was not in vain.

Many days passed before Westy and Rip were able to recognize their surroundings and friends. And then their recovery was rapid.

Then came the day when Mrs. Redmond propped them up a little on their cots to watch the sunset. Their open windows overlooked the ledge and deep ravine below.

There once again Westy watched the huge red ball slowly disintegrate until the blue background and

fleecy clouds became obliterated as it dropped behind the mountain opposite, leaving the vast ethereal spaces a mass of crimson-purple fire and the western heavens a sphere apart.

Even this, thought Westy, cannot last. This rainbow spectacle so vast and commanding in its great beauty must also pay homage to the law of gravitation, withdrawing its place in the scheme of things and making way for the somber shadows of twilight.

Everything was silent in this quiet hour but the brook. It sounded loudest in the twilight and tinkled its silvery way over the rocks and into the chasm below.

"Rip, that mountain over there——"

"Yes?"

"The world. Reality! It's horrible and real. I'd rather live in my imagination here—after facing those real things again, wouldn't you?"

"You bet!"

"To be drowning, to be hungry and thirsty and cold—that's real! It's then we know what life really is, eh? No make-believe about that. You almost hate everything you've loved before. I mean the sun when you're thirsty, the night and the rain that

keep you back from finding your way and the barren earth that won't yield you nourishment. That's real and it won't do a thing for you. You're just left to make or break with two hands and two feet, no matter how helpless Nature has made you. Am I right?"

"What? You ask me that? After this, Wes, I'm willing to learn from you—not give my paltry opinion on anything."

"I'm glad to hear it," Mr. Wilde said as he and Billy came into the room. "You've learned a pretty dear lesson, I guess."

"Oh, we all make mistakes," Westy defended him.

"I can't see that you have, Westy. If you have they've been good ones," Mr. Wilde reminded.

"We're here now, aren't we?" Rip said, hoping the matter would forthwith be a closed incident. "Westy got me back all right, so that's all there is to it!"

"Yes, thanks to Westy," his uncle said. "But I failed to see how you intended making we modern pikers sit up and take notice!"

Billy laughed. "Not from what I saw of him on Westy's shoulder that day. He wasn't even able to sit up and take notice himself!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

OLD SCOUT AND THE LEGEND

A WEEK later Westy and Rip were back again in the cabin, looking none the worse for having gone through such an ordeal—thanks to the kindness of Mrs. Redmond and Lola.

It was Saturday; they were alone, the two older members being out on the trail making up for lost time, as they were due in Santa Fe the next week.

Lola had invited them for supper Sunday evening and they had planned to leave Monday morning.

"You know, Rip," Westy said impulsively, "I'd risk my neck again if I thought I could help Lola and her grandmother. They've certainly been the best!"

"I kinda think so," Rip answered, and added: "You like Lola pretty well, don't you?"

Westy reddened and laughed.

"Go on, Rip! Try something else!"

They heard voices and presently the door opened, admitting Educational Films. Billy put his stuff down and Mr. Wilde sank wearily into a chair.

"Well, I guess that's all for this Range. The only thing we missed taking was the fleas. I'm satisfied to pull out of here now."

"Yet," Billy said, "it's been nice knowing those fine people!"

"Indeed it has," Mr. Wilde agreed, "and that reminds me——"

"Oh, yes," Billy interrupted, "the guide and that party of roughnecks. Go on, tell them!"

"We met some people this morning just as we stepped out in the trail. An old man—pioneer type, called himself Old Scout, and a bunch of newly rich—you know the kind. He's a guide and was taking them up to the haunted lake to camp over to-night and are coming back to-morrow.

"They were babbling so, talking a lot of stuff, that Billy and I got way ahead of them with Old Scout. We got up to Redmond's trail and he excused himself to his party; said he wanted to make a call on them. They sat down and had a bite to eat and we went along with him.

"We were welcome as always and so was he. It seems he has known them all—even the first John Redmond. Lived in this cabin we've been using for thirty years. Says he got to be too old to live alone

(he's a man about seventy-five now, but splendid physique), and lives with a married daughter somewhere in the foothills. Earns a little now and then by guiding some of these would-be's, but never could-be's.

"However, they chatted awhile and Mrs. Redmond insisted upon him having a little snack. A perfect hostess, that lady! She made him promise to stop with his party on their way back to-morrow. Incidentally, she reminded us that we are expected also.

"We promised and left and resumed our talk with him. We told him how fine the Redmonds had been to us and the affair at the lake and forest.

"He said to escape from that place of torment was considered a miracle and he commented upon Westy's ability to have stayed up the way he did.

"Then I asked him what he thought of the lake legend and the cliff. He took a chew of tobacco and wagged his head.

" 'Wa'al, I allus believed in it, same's everybody roun' here, I reckon, but here in the late spring one of them government scientists come 'long to look it over. He brought a powerful lot o' loafers with him, too.

“ ‘They hired me to guide ’em up to the lake fust. Wa’al, after they monkeyed aroun’ with all sorts of queer-lookin’ appliances ’n’ brought up buckets full of dirt out o’ the side o’ the lake, we started on ’roun’ to the forest.

“ ‘I put my foot down flat when we got there and told ’em I’d camp outside on the trail until—they got out—if they ever did. They laughed at me, but in all my time a pusson was considered right crazy if they went in there.

“ ‘Along in four days they came out again and the scientist said to me, “Well, Old Scout, we got out all right, didn’t we?” I said, Yes, I reckon he did. Now what was it all about I asked him. He told me.

“ ‘It seems the forest must have been really the camping ground of some tribe long ago, sure enough. He knew the legend, but he said he didn’t take any stock in the cliff dwellers. Anyway, these Indians wanted to perfect themselves from enemies, he said, so they moved out on the cliff facing the lake and planted that forest. He says it must o’ took two generations and more to perfect this natural fortress. Nothin’ but tree after tree, some hardly five feet apart, and they planted them in a puffect circle. It took them scientists four hull days to go around it

and he said they couldn't a-done it in that time if they hadn't known about the circle.

" 'He sez it's the trees make it so damp; they're so big around and so high, no sun ever gits in. Becuz o' the swampy groun' the snakes love it. 'N' with no stream anywheres about, it makes it wuss. Them days Injuns must 'a' been hard-hearted critters.

" 'And the lake?' " I reminded him.

" " 'Yes, that's so,' " he said. Nothin' ter thet either, accordin' to the scientist. He sez the lake has an almost bottomless depth 'n' becuz of its narrer basin and something 'bout an unknown source is what makes them whirlpools, 'specially when a storm's comin' it's wuss. 'N' about it bein' hot water, he sez thet water is rich in mineral substances underneath thet throw out treemenjus heat 'n' with the water churlin' so crazy it's twice as bad.

" 'So, I don't believe in the legend no more. I miss it, too! It was a right nice little story.' "

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SOME LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT

"Do you consider yourself squelched, Westy?" Mr. Wilde teased him. "About the haunted topic, I mean?"

"No, I don't," Westy said and meant it. "Any lake and forest that could make a fellow feel like that is supernatural and I don't care what any hard-boiled scientist says."

"Tell Westy what Old Scout said about the Redmond affair, too," Billy reminded him.

"Yes. He knew all about that story, too, from John Redmond the first. He said that he was a fine fellow, but he liked adventure and was always getting into some innocent scrape when he was a boy in England. Then he ran away from home when he heard about the first cry of gold in this country. His father was a baronet or something and his mother, the countess, was prostrated after her son went away. She almost died and it so enraged his father to see his wife go on so that he sent word to his son never to bring disgrace upon them in

any way. If he did, the father wrote him, the next shock would kill his mother and he, the son, would be responsible and as good as guilty of her murder.

"They must have been awful prudes that family, because John Redmond knew what would happen if they found out about Lone Star. Probably they were so snobbish they would never understand that in her way the Indian girl was as noble and gentle as they. And of course at that time all Europe thought American Indians were a lot of drunkards, thieves and murderers. At any rate, the fear of causing his mother any more anguish kept him back from writing to them after he married Lone Star.

"This Paul Mitchell was a rascal and had had Redmond's confidence about his family affairs. Also, Mitchell, as we have already been told, hated the Indians fiercely and also Lone Star, whom he thought just roped his partner into the whole business to get his money. And he hated his partner for caring for her. Thought he was just spineless and said he'd never give any gold that he had helped to find to an Indian.

"After Mitchell had escaped no one heard of him for a long while, and Redmond had too much family pride and was too much of a gentleman to hunt his

former friend down as a culprit. And when he did hear it was Mitchell himself who wrote to him and warned him that if Redmond tried to make any trouble for him he'd reveal everything to his family. Now it seems that Redmond had a first cousin in England who had great sympathy and understanding for him. They corresponded as often as it was possible for people to correspond in those times and out of the way places. Eventually the cousin's daughter came here, who is the present Mrs. Redmond. She is a high-born woman.

"Mitchell and Redmond were equal partners and they struck it rich. Redmond alone was worth over two million when he died if Mitchell had given it to him.

"One fine day Mitchell moved to Santa Fe along about the time that John Redmond the second was born. So after a short time they met and Mitchell laughed in Redmond's face and told him about never sharing his money with a man who had married an Indian. Besides, Redmond's parents were still both alive and very old, and this he held as a sword over the Englishman's head.

"When Redmond returned he swore he would never go near Mitchell again and in later years he extracted promises from his son and grandson that

they wouldn't either in deference to Lone Star whose race Mitchell had insulted.

"Then the present Mrs. Redmond came into a little money from her mother's estate and this she shared with all and they've been living on it ever since.

"With nothing coming in and all going out, they're about down to the last cent, Old Scout said, but they're too proud to go to the present generation of Mitchells and tell them their plight."

"Where are the present Mitchells?" Westy asked eagerly.

"Living in gilded splendor in Santa Fe, Old Scout told me," Mr. Wilde answered.

"But how can they prove their claim now?" Westy was all interest. "Mitchell stole the paper that was all the witness Redmond had, didn't he?"

"That's the interesting thing. Mitchell with all his antagonism and prejudice against the Indians and which he took out on John Redmond all his life must have had a troubled conscience.

"At all events, it is whispered around Santa Fe and, in fact, some one said it was in the Santa Fe paper at the time, that when old Paul Mitchell died he willed a certain sealed envelope to his son.

"In it was a document and the envelope was never

to be opened during his son's life nor his son's lifetime. But the first son or daughter of his grandson was to open the sealed envelope on the event of their twenty-first birthday, and it hasn't been opened yet. They know nothing of the Redmonds at all, I believe."

"He must have been crazy!" Rip piped up shrilly.

"Not crazy, Rip," his uncle answered. "Just an eccentric, prejudiced, old man who let hate grow like a weed in his life, obliterating honor and everything else that's worth while."

"Why," asked Billy, perplexed, "didn't he want that envelope opened until his great-grandson's maturity? And what makes you think it has something to do with Redmond?"

"Because I think the ingenious old scoundrel figured that the Indian strain would be about faded out in this generation. You see? He wanted his hate to live after him until the Indian was almost forgotten and the race was deteriorating. I may be wrong, but I don't think so."

"Where," Westy asked Mr. Wilde, "do they keep the envelope?"

"In their home, I believe."

CHAPTER XXXIX

FLAMES

"WHAT do you intend doing with that paper," Rip asked Westy on their way to Lola's the next day; "steal it?"

"Of course not! Does a scout steal?"

"No—not a real one!"

"Well, then, what made you ask me a thing like that?"

"Oh, I don't know. On the level though, Wes, what have you up your sleeve?"

"My arm."

"Yes, I know, but what else?"

"Little boys shouldn't ask questions."

"Aw, I won't tell," he pleaded.

"All right—if you want to know, I'm just going to pay the Mitchells a nice friendly call when we get in Santa Fe, that's all!"

"I see," said Rip. "You're too deep for me."

They returned from the Redmond cottage early in the evening. Walking back by way of the brook,

each one seemed listening to all the familiar sounds for the last time.

Lola had insisted upon them staying longer, but they had much packing to do in order to leave early enough in the morning.

"We'll miss this little old bunch of chatter," Billy remarked about the brook.

"We'll miss it all," Mr. Wilde said, "except when it rains."

"What'd you think of Old Scout to-day, Westy?" Mr. Wilde inquired.

"I liked him fine, but he didn't stay long enough for me to get acquainted with him. Didn't care much about the would-be's, though."

"No, who could? They seemed even to be dissatisfied with themselves!"

"Yes," Westy said, "I heard them quarreling. I stepped on three lighted cigarettes while they were there. There'd be no forests at all if the would-be's came here very often."

"There's logic in that," Rip replied.

"You sound like Pee-wee Harris," Westy said.

Two hours later Westy awakened in the dark cabin. The breathing of the rest sounded mechani-

cal as he listened. He could hear the brook so plain in the silence. It was tireless, he thought, day and night flowing on and on, summer and winter. It made him feel tired to think of it.

Something pungent seemed to strike his nostrils like that of burning wood.

"Now, what could that be, I wonder?" he mused. "Must be some embers in the fireplace."

He got out of his bunk and tip-toed to the fireplace. It was stone cold. He went to the door and opened it softly. The acrid odor was not to be mistaken. He went in and got his clothes on.

A few minutes later as Westy sprinted along the trail he saw the dark heavens ahead of him outlined in a dull red glow, and through the trees he could distinguish little red sparks shooting into the air.

The wind was blowing southwest—straight in the direction of the cottage! He ran on. With each few steps he could see the glow in the sky getting brighter and gradually the sparks lengthened into flames and the flames lengthened into shafts of red fire, leaping into the air like whirling dervishes.

Westy fairly leaped ahead, too, wondering if Lola and her grandmother were aware of it. He hadn't

any time to go back and arouse the rest—he had to go on! They must need help or they *would* be needing it very soon.

At last he struck the trail down to the cottage, but stopped as he viewed the strange freak of fate before him.

The fire was confined to only one side of the trail and the side nearest the ravine. That, of course, was fortunate, because it would go no further in that direction.

But a sprightly breeze was blowing southwest, and as it blew through the flaming area it sounded like the light treading of many phantom feet. And it was sweeping—how far had it gone? He rushed forward and all along the way the fire was still ahead of him to the right.

Westy's throat was beginning to feel as scorched as the ground looked where the fire had passed on. His eyes were stinging, but he didn't care, for looking up suddenly, he saw that the fire was now on the very edge of the Redmond clearing.

His ears were pounding against his head from running and the roar of the burning trees was deafening, but above it all he heard a girl's cry.

CHAPTER XL

A HEAP OF EMBERS

WESTY's heart was wrung with pity when he saw the cottage! The whole side facing the arbor was one sheet of flame and the arbor now existed only in memory.

The two lone occupants were standing on the other side of the brook surrounded by a few possessions they had been able to save. Lola cried when she saw Westy.

"Did you get everything out? Are you hurt, either of you?" He reached them breathless.

"No, not hurt." The tears were rolling down her cheeks. "But, Westy," she sobbed, "we forgot the one thing that means most to us now!"

"What's that?" he cried.

"An ebony case," Mrs. Redmond cried, for Lola was too overcome with emotion to talk. "It contains papers identifying us as kin of John Redmond. Oh, dear," the woman cried, "we haven't much chance without it!"

"Where is it?" Westy cried. "Quick!"

"You can't get it—it's probably gone now! It was right in the top bedroom dresser drawer—the first one. I don't know how I came to miss it. Look!"

True, the place was a veritable inferno, but Westy rolled over in the brook and soaked himself from head to foot and started into the cottage, in spite of their protestations.

How he ever managed to keep his feet on the little rickety stairway he didn't know. It was seething with the heat.

The little upper floor was ablaze, and part of the floors had already fallen, so Westy had to step warily. He didn't need any light; fortunately the flames were torch enough.

The flames were licking about the foot of the dresser as he opened the drawer and found what he was after. Grasping the case, he put it inside of his blouse and rushed for the stairway again. But it was no more than a lot of burning spindles now and the lower floor with its quaint old pioneer furniture was a helpless victim to the malevolent flames.

He ran to the window over the front door and

climbed out and down on the ivy-covered trellis now so dry that it crackled as his hands clung to its support. As he jumped to the ground he faced the little white door that had blown shut.

The little door, Westy thought, that had opened and shut to three generations of Redmonds. A door that had felt the trample of little feet over its threshold and stood open to let the sunshine into all their lives and shut itself against the tempests.

It didn't seem just, Westy thought, to shut in those memories; all the hopes and fears that the years had brought and left behind. It wouldn't be fair to give up the spirit of all that love, faith and loyalty to the merciless destroyer. So he opened the door.

The two homeless creatures grasped Westy's hands in their gratitude and he noticed that the worst of their grief was now passed. They seemed to be resigned and watched their beloved little home gradually reduced to a heap of burning embers, as the fire died out on the edge of the brook.

Westy felt a drop of rain on his forehead, then another, and as it started to patter steadily on the dry leaves they arose from the ground.

Why couldn't that have happened before? he thought. Fate always worked things backwards, and he spoke his thoughts to Lola.

"No, not backwards," she said gravely, "but for the best."

Wonderful people, he told himself. Take life, death and laughter just as it comes.

As they walked into the darkness toward the shack, Westy saw them turn—a look on their faces as they viewed the desolate scene that perplexed him. It seemed to be a look of relief, as though they had been freed of the bonds that bound them to the past.

Joining him again, he heard Lola sigh wearily and wondered if it were sleepiness or a sigh of doubt as to the future.

CHAPTER XLI

WESTY HAS A PART TO PLAY

THEY met Rip, his uncle and Billy before they were half way. As he told them later, they'd make a fine lot of applicants for volunteer firemen, sleeping as sound as that.

"Well, how did we know?" Rip asked; "you never let us know!"

Westy explained to them that time had been at a premium and so that part of the matter was dropped.

It seemed to them all that the greatest sympathy they could give to the unfortunate girl and her grandmother was silence.

Mr. Wilde suggested that nothing more be said until morning, and they could make more plans then. They gave up the shack to the women and put up their tents outside. It was almost dawn when they settled down for a few winks.

When they awoke the sun was flooding their tents with a warm yellow light. As Westy and Rip were dressing Mr. Wilde came in.

"We've got to leave here to-day, kids," he said, "much as I hate to, but I was thinking we could leave all our camping stuff. These people will need it and all the food we have. We won't need it again anyway in Santa Fe."

"But what are they going to do?" Westy asked. "I could tell last night they're about down to brass tacks."

"That's what I came in to tell you," he continued. "I'm going to see to it that they get a supply of food, but in the meantime a little investigating is going to be done. Lola's just promised to give me those identification papers when we go. May not even have to use them, but it's best to have them in case they're needed. She told me all that Old Scout had said about it was true."

Westy was keyed up to a high pitch of interest now.

"Now," Mr. Wilde said seriously and at the same time wriggled the cigar over to the other side of his mouth, "you, Westy, have your little part to play in this, and if you fail I think some legal steps can be taken."

"Oh, boy, that's my middle name!" Westy was enthusiastic. "Where does my part come in?"

"Just this: Lola told me that Paul Mitchell the third has a son just about your age."

"Well, what's that got to do with me?"

"Nothing, only that he's a Boy Scout!"

CHAPTER XLII

SETTING OUT TO DO IT

THEY had left Lamy and were climbing steadily upward. Westy was looking out of the train window at the uninhabited miles of land, relieved by the juniper, piñon and scrub dotting the landscape."

"Here's hoping the city of Santa Fe is one of promise," Mr. Wilde remarked. "I haven't really thought out any special line of attack as yet."

"Well, I think you can leave that part to me," Westy said with a tone of finality. "I've planned it all out."

"I'm glad to hear it. What is your first step? That's all you need tell me."

"To ask the clerk at the hotel where the Mitchells live and how to get there."

"That sounds good. No beating around the bush for you, eh? Go straight for the mark—that's good sense. I'll give you time enough. We have to beat

it in a week or so. You ought to find out what's what in that space of time, eh?"

"Sure. Easy!"

They were in the station and could hear the enthusiastic cries of the hackmen and busmen and taxi drivers. Certainly a conglomeration, Westy thought as they stepped into a Ford taxi and were whisked to their hotel.

"This bird must have had his training on Forty-second Street," Billy said, as the taxi driver perilously piloted his car through a street so narrow that two people could have shaken hands across the street without leaving the sidewalk.

At the hotel they all registered before Westy, and when it came his turn he looked up at the clerk, an amiable-looking chap, and smiled broadly.

No one ever could resist the warmth of Westy's smile and this clerk was certainly more than susceptible. He smiled back.

"Came quite a distance to Santa Fe?" he said cordially. "Staying long?"

"No, only a week," Westy answered.

"Well, you can see a lot in that time," he said, "if you're observing."

"Oh, I'm observant, all right," Westy remarked casually. "I'm a Boy Scout!"

"Oh, are you?" He seemed interested.

"Sure. We always like to meet scouts when we go to other cities. Do you happen to know any?"

Mr. Wilde, seeing that Westy was started on the right track, motioned Billy and Rip to go on up with him to their rooms.

"No, I don't know any," the clerk said, leaning over the counter, "but I know of them. There's a mighty rich family here that's always donating to them. The son is in it, I think. See it in the papers often. They're multi-millionaires and live near the outskirts of the city. Snobs, though, I hear!"

"Huh," Westy said. "Know their name?"

"Mitchell."

Westy entered the room, a broad grin on his face.

"I see you've hit it!" Mr. Wilde said.

"Harder than that," he said and got into his scout suit.

"What," said Rip, "so quick?"

"Sure. A scout has got to get on the job while the getting is good."

"Atta boy!" Billy remarked.

When he was all ready and went to the door he turned back as Mr. Wilde spoke.

"We're going to take some shots of the Plaza here, Westy! It used to be the western terminus of the Old Trail. If you don't find us here when you get back take a stroll on down."

A few minutes later Westy was hurrying through quiet, narrow, unpaved streets, lined on each side with one-story adobes.

Some Santa Feans strolling leisurely along in the mid-afternoon sun stopped to turn and look after Westy's slim figure, so gorgeously arrayed in complete scout attire.

Westy was unconscious of any stares, however. He walked on indifferent to the picturesque Tesuque Indian with his black hair bound with its scarlet bandeau and brilliantly colored blanket.

The cries of the newspaper boys with their English and Spanish papers he left behind as he entered the residential district, where one could see at first glance that the adobes here were much larger and more pretentious.

Inquiring the way of a very Spanish-looking gentleman, Westy felt quite grown up as that honorable Don greeted him with a "Buenos días, señor!"

He walked away after he had been given the information, but had only gone a few feet when the Don called him back. He nodded ahead in the direction of a boy about Westy's age who was standing in conversation with an older boy.

"That is the young Señor Mitchell just ahead," the man told him.

CHAPTER XLIII

PAUL MITCHELL

WESTY thanked him and the man walked on and disappeared in one of the picturesque adobes.

The young Señor Mitchell bid his companion adieu also and they went in opposite directions, so Westy hurried after him.

As he got near him he walked slow on purpose and passed in front of him leisurely. He could feel the close scrutiny that young Mitchell gave him as he passed.

"Hello, Scout!"

Westy turned and smiled.

"Hello!"

"Stranger?"

"Sure. Martin, Bridgeboro, N. J."

"Go on! Mitchell—I go to Crestwood."

"N. J.?"

"Betcha."

"What luck!" said Westy. "Crestwood Boys' School isn't far from my house."

"I'm hardly ever home," said Mitchell.

Westy could tell it by his New Jersey accent. It was true his manner was a trifle snobbish, but Westy rather liked him.

"What you doing in town, Martin?"

He told him and they walked on through the streets. They exchanged views on scout matters and after a while they came to a curio shop and Westy stopped a minute to look in the show window. Navajo blankets and silver jewelry, Pueblo pottery and moccasins and all the other little fascinating things one sees in the Santa Fe shops. He remarked about the skill of the Indians in making those things.

"Yes, they are!" Mitchell agreed. "Still, none of my family have ever had much use for Indians and yet we've lived with them around us all our lives."

Getting warmer, Westy thought.

"How's that, Mitchell?"

"Gee, I don't know. Guess they don't know themselves."

They reached the hotel and Westy invited him up to his room. He accepted. He seemed to want to hear all about the adventures Rip and he had had with the members of Educational Films.

Westy related to him about the hold-up and how he and Rip had kept it so quiet. In the middle of his recital he jumped up out of the chair in which he was sitting and whipped out his watch.

"You'll have to excuse me, Martin. 'S almost dinner time and Dad's a terrible fusser when we're late. Come up to the house to-morrow afternoon and let's hear the rest." He shook hands with Westy and was gone.

The next afternoon Westy was on the job and admitted into the Mitchell home by a Mexican butler with an expressionless face.

Young Mitchell came forward to meet him and greeted him cordially, leading Westy out into a spacious plazita and introduced him to his father and mother. They actually seemed to unbend from their assumed mental stiffness as he smiled in his naïve way.

Westy was the kind of a boy that made people act natural. He had that genuineness of spirit and character that forced them to drop the artificialities and smile at the realities.

Indeed, the Mitchells were so taken with Westy's boyish charm and ruggedness that they insisted on his staying to dinner.

After the dinner hour was over and they sat out in the plazita again, Westy watched the setting sun throwing its rose-colored shadows through the trees and hollyhocks along the yonder wall.

It was a quaint, charming place, this Santa Fe, with its Spanish atmosphere and alluring traditions. It all made him think of two lonely people in a little mountain shack who had put their entire trust in a boy.

He was wondering if they, too, were thinking and watching the sunset shadows against the mountain walls while they stood amongst the charred embers that had been their home. He was startled out of his reveries by Mr. Mitchell's voice.

"I hear you've had some thrilling experiences in the mountains, Westy! Tell us about them!"

Westy thought a moment and wondered if the occasion was propitious. He hadn't much time! Nothing like getting it over with, he reasoned, as Mrs. Mitchell laid down the book she was reading to listen to him.

He told them of their strange meeting with Lola and the charming little ivy-covered cottage with its flower garden and related her story of Lone Star

with its touch of sweet romance. He was careful not to divulge the names of either young men in the story whom the Indian Princess had aided.

And he went on to tell of those two lonely creatures who were living in poverty now, a lady approaching old age and a girl who had all the charming quaintness of the old world.

He didn't omit a detail even down to old Mitchell's prejudice, having kept them from having what was rightfully theirs.

Their own terrible ordeal in the forest Westy told him, but skimming it over lightly and laying more stress on the plight of Lola and her grandmother.

When he came to the part in this real-life narrative of the cottage burning and all their homely possessions going, Westy actually saw a tear fall on Mrs. Mitchell's cheek.

"They have been shamefully treated," Mr. Mitchell finally said. "Who are these people?"

"Their name is Redmond," Westy answered, and waited to see the effect it had. But he was disappointed, for the name meant nothing to them.

"Who did you say the man was who so misused the confidence of the first John Redmond?"

"It's quite coincidental," Westy said, feeling his way over thin ice, "but it is said his descendants also live in Santa Fe."

"And his name?"

"Paul Mitchell!"

CHAPTER XLIV

ON THE RIGHT TRAIL

"Of course," Westy said, pretending he didn't see them start, "there's other Mitchells here!"

"No." Mr. Mitchell looked grave. "Not that I know of! My grandfather was Paul Mitchell."

"Did you say that these people heard about a sealed envelope in the family having been willed to my son?" Mrs. Mitchell was now aroused also.

"Yes, that's the way I heard it. They saw it in the Santa Fe paper, I think."

"You are right, Westy," the older man said. "That envelope is in this house now. In my safe and worth a fortune—— Is it possible to wire Miss and Mrs. Redmond?"

"Yes. It would take two days to reach them, though."

"That would be all right. It would give us all time. I'll wire them enough to get here with and meantime I'll see my attorney. There's a part of the Mitchell fortune that we've never been allowed

to touch. Always have been in the dark about it, but can see the light through it now. When my grandfather willed the sealed envelope to my son we had an idea it contained instructions of how to dispose of the forbidden part. I'll find out if my grandsire had a codicil to the will which would make my son's share forfeitable should the envelope be prematurely opened."

"Yes," Mrs. Mitchell said, "whatever wrong has been done must be righted and I guess it looks as though Fate has chosen Westy." She had risen simultaneously with him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Come for dinner Sunday and bring your friends," she said.

They all shook hands and as Westy started to leave he saw the Mexican butler move from behind a tree and fairly glide into the house. He called good-night and young Mitchell walked out with him.

"It'll be great having you to dinner on Sunday. You can be there when your friends come; it'll surprise them. G'night!"

"Good-night!"

Westy felt that he had earned a night's repose when he got in his room. Rip was already in bed

and Billy and Mr. Wilde were draped in graceless attitudes about the various chairs. They had the look of having been waiting for news, so he told them as he undressed.

"You're some little fixer, Wes!" Mr. Wilde complimented him. "Are they nice people?"

"Oh, sure," he answered, "after they thaw out. They invited all of you dubs up for dinner Sunday."

"Is that a nice way to speak to Papa Wilde, Westy?"

"No, it's not considered nice, but it's more human."

"You're a sketch! No, we won't butt in on this Mitchell affair at all—not even Rip! It's going to be your party. We'll have a chance to say good-by to Lola and Mrs. Redmond before they go, I guess. Anyhow, we're only too tickled that everything looks rosy!"

"Yes, he never questioned their story at all."

"Then there's no cause to worry, do you think?"

"No, only about getting to bed," Billy said between yawns.

Billy could always break up the party.

CHAPTER XLV

VOICES

SATURDAY afternoon young Mitchell burst in upon Westy with the news that Lola and Mrs. Redmond had wired back. They were coming on the Sunday evening train.

"Everything's set now, Martin," he said excitedly. "Dad says the attorney O. K.'d opening the envelope and made an appointment to have him bring your friends to his office Monday morning."

"That sounds good," Westy said. "I'm glad for their sake."

"Get up to the house early to-morrow—I'll show you some of my things."

The next day Westy met young Mitchell before he got halfway to their home. He was coming along at breakneck speed on a motorcycle and stopped short right by him.

"Hallo!" he greeted. "Some stunt, eh, Martin? I don't ride this tin can very often except when I have too much surplus energy. Then I try stunts."

"You mean you try to break your neck. I'd like to have that tin can just the same," Westy said enviously.

"Want to hop on? I'll show your some peachy tricks before we go home."

Westy got on and watched him steer with a steady hand.

"See that car ahead?" he asked Westy.

"Yeh. What about it?"

"Well, just watch me cut in front of it and swerve out on the road again."

"Yes, I'll watch you all right. I better watch myself. It'd be just my luck to fall off. I'm no whiner though—go to it!"

Young Mitchell needed no further inducements. He got up in back of the big sedan and with a roar and lurch he speeded ahead and cut in front of the car, and before Westy knew it they were back on the road again with the sedan stalled back in the distance.

He laughed, but all Westy could do was smile—he didn't feel that it was a laughing matter.

"Want to see me do it again?"

"I couldn't say no if I tried," Westy said resignedly.

"Watch me closely then and you can learn!"

By the time Mitchells had dinner early Sunday evening Westy had become quite adept in cutting motor cars with a motorcycle.

At dinner the conversation was about the expected arrivals that evening.

The Mexican butler, gliding in and out from the kitchen to the dining-room, seemed to be aware of everything that was needed, yet Westy couldn't see that he looked at anything. He just seemed to look ahead all the time, his little beady eyes perfectly expressionless. A little man he was, with swarthy skin and shiny black hair. A perfect butler, no doubt, but Westy didn't like him.

"Baptiste!" Mr. Mitchell addressed him as he was bending over the server on the opposite side of the room.

"Yees, sir!" His English was broken and he turned from what he was doing.

"Order the big car," Mr. Mitchell said; "we are going down to the station to meet some guests!"

"Yees, sir!" Baptiste answered as he turned to finish his duties at the server.

"Well, that's that," Mr. Mitchell was saying. "We'll get the envelope out of the tin box in the safe

to-morrow and give those people what's coming to them!"

At that juncture the butler glanced at Mr. Mitchell and left the room.

"Say, Dad, I was telling Westy it'd be good fun to have him wait here until we get back and surprise his friends. It'll be more friendly when they come in to see him, don't you think?"

"Certainly!" Mrs. Mitchell said.

"Go up in the library while we're gone and read what you like. You can roam all over the house if you want to," Mr. Mitchell added.

Young Mitchell took him up in the library and showed him what was most interesting, so five minutes after they had all left for the station Westy was comfortably ensconced in a big library chair. It was so big it completely hid him from view and he browsed to his heart's content.

The big house was silent; the kitchen noises had stopped and he could hear the two servants padding up the back stairway to their rooms. A little later he heard them go down again—a door closed somewhere in the back and the sounds of two pair of feet stepping along the gravel driveway reminded him that Sunday night was the servants' night.

A clock chimed the quarter of the hour and then the house lapsed into silence again.

It seemed to Westy that he must have been reading for hours, so intent was he on his book. But he wasn't reading long at that, for the clock chimed the half hour, and he heard the padding of two pairs of shoes coming up the broad stairway.

He listened as they stopped at the open doorway of the library. The one leading must have stopped abruptly, as its follower shuffled his feet on the polished floor he stopped so suddenly.

"There ees not much time," the first voice said, right in the room with Westy.

It was Baptiste; he knew the voice and was thankful the big chair was hiding him.

"The safe," Baptiste went on talking, "ees right here!"

CHAPTER XLVI

A TRUST WELL KEPT

HE heard hurried movements and low mutterings, probably in their frenzy to open the safe. Then an exclamation as if it finally yielded.

"Ah," Baptiste exclaimed. "That's why I look at Meester Mitchell open the safe. Now I open it, see?"

"The leetle tin box," the other Mexican exclaimed; "it's locked!"

Then he heard the heavy safe door swing shut and the sound of footsteps toward the hall.

"We weel open it at my house then!"

They went out of the room and, as they padded down the stairs, Westy jumped up quietly and followed. As he got to the head of the stairs the other Mexican went on out, while Baptiste was extinguishing the lights, leaving only a dim night light burning in the hall.

As Westy got halfway down the stairs Baptiste went out also, so he hurried out after him quietly

and hid behind some shrubbery in the driveway. The other Mexican was leaning over a rickety-looking Ford touring car and he put the precious tin box in the back seat, while Baptiste climbed in behind the wheel.

Westy's mind was working fast. The Mexican got in the front seat also and as Baptiste turned on his tail light the scout's heart leaped with joy as he saw young Mitchell's motorcycle parked back in the driveway.

With the usual trembling of tin the Ford drove out into the roadway headed for the outskirts of the city. Before it had gone a block and a half, however, Westy was out of the driveway on the motorcycle and like a shot went after them.

Whether it was a guilty conscience or not, something prompted Baptiste to step on his gas and go the limit.

"Well, I'll go the limit, too," Westy said, "whether it's my motorcycle or not."

As he passed the corner on one wheel he saw a policeman standing talking to some people in another Ford and Westy shouted for them to follow.

Looking back, he saw they had started and so he

went on. He knew Baptiste couldn't keep it up with the exception that he might slip into some dark road and lose him.

So he crawled up easy just as young Mitchell had showed him and got alongside of the Ford. He raised himself then, just in a half standing position and reached over in the back seat of the touring car.

The handle of the little tin box was upright and it was the will of Providence that this was so or Westy could never have grasped it with one hand.

Indeed, it all happened so quickly that neither Baptiste nor his companion realized what had happened.

With one hand grasping the tin box close to his breast and the other on the steering gear, Westy proved to Baptiste that he could do almost as good as young Mitchell when it came to stunts.

He slowed down again—and then rushed forward with a lurch and a roar, cutting in front of the ramshackle Ford.

But Westy forgot one thing that young Mitchell had taught him. He forgot that the feat required both hands on the steering gear, for as he cut in front of it he held more tightly to the tin box than

he did to the motorcycle, and as it lurched it hit a deep rut in the road and threw him bodily—into the field beyond.

The policeman picked him up a few seconds later—unconscious—but against his breast the tin box was tightly clasped.

CHAPTER XLVII

HOMeward BOUND

WHEN Westy opened his eyes again he was in the Mitchell library—on the divan.

A doctor sat by him, Mr. Wilde and Rip and Billy—also the Mitchells. In the open doorway Lola and Mrs. Redmond stood smiling, then came forward.

“You’re tiptop now,” said the doctor, taking his case. “You must be made of rubber. Only stunned, that was all.”

“Where’s the Mexicans?” Westy asked.

“In the lock-up!” Mr. Wilde said.

“Hello, Lola!”

“Hello yourself, Westy! You have almost broken your neck for us this time, haven’t you?”

“That’s what he said he’d do!” piped up Rip, “if it would help you people!”

“Aw, forget it!” Westy was embarrassed with all these admirers looking on.

“I know I think you’re a fine boy,” said Mr.

Mitchell, "and I want to thank you for exposing an untrustworthy servant."

"Your courage was splendid," Mrs. Mitchell added.

"Well, come on, kid." Billy was attempting to lift Westy as if to carry him, but the scout frustrated his attempt and stood on his own feet. "All right"—Billy was not a bit balked—"as long as you can walk. But we must get to bed—it's getting late!"

And as usual Billy busted up the party.

What thoughts crowded through Westy's mind no one will ever know but himself as he stood with his friends once again on the observation platform—this time homeward-bound!

The Mitchells had bid him farewell and promised to visit him, especially young Mitchell, who said he'd be Johnny on the spot in Bridgeboro after he went back to school.

But Lola and Mrs. Redmond. It was different to bid them good-by with their eyes moist and smiling faces. They also promised to visit them.

They weren't going back to the mountains again—not for a while. They were going to sup the joy out of the cup of Life. It was glorious to see them—

their happiness and joy emanating from their very expressions.

Only a few days until the matter would be settled and they would have what belonged to them—never to want again!

The train moved out slowly and it seemed to them, standing on the moving train, that all humanity was calling farewell. Then as the distance widened between them the outline of their forms became blurred and faded from view.

The shadows of twilight had stolen upon them. It was the witching hour in the mountains—the time for rest, repose and meditation.

As Westy looked upward where the white peaks of the Sierra Sangre de Cristo leaned majestically against the heavens, he listened instinctively again for the murmur of the brook. What was it he heard instead?

The train slowed down as they took a curve and from afar in the distance came the sweet yet sad tinkle of the vesper bells.

“Must be that old Cathedral in Santa Fe we hear it from,” Mr. Wilde said; “the air is so clear it carries.”

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A porter looked out of the door and nodded to Billy.

"Youah berth's made up, sir!"

"Got to get to bed, brothers! Good-night!"

They answered and he disappeared in the car.

Westy fell in a reverie again, as the tinkle of the bells were lost in the noise of the speeding train.

"They're beautiful, though," he said dreamily, "those vesper bells!"

Mr. Wilde looked at him and then shook his head in perplexity.

"You're a hard nut to crack, Westy!"

"There's no need of trying to crack me at all."

"Why?"

"I guess I was born that way!"

THE END





